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Washington MONTHLY

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PLUS: Matt Yglesias on Bob Shrum
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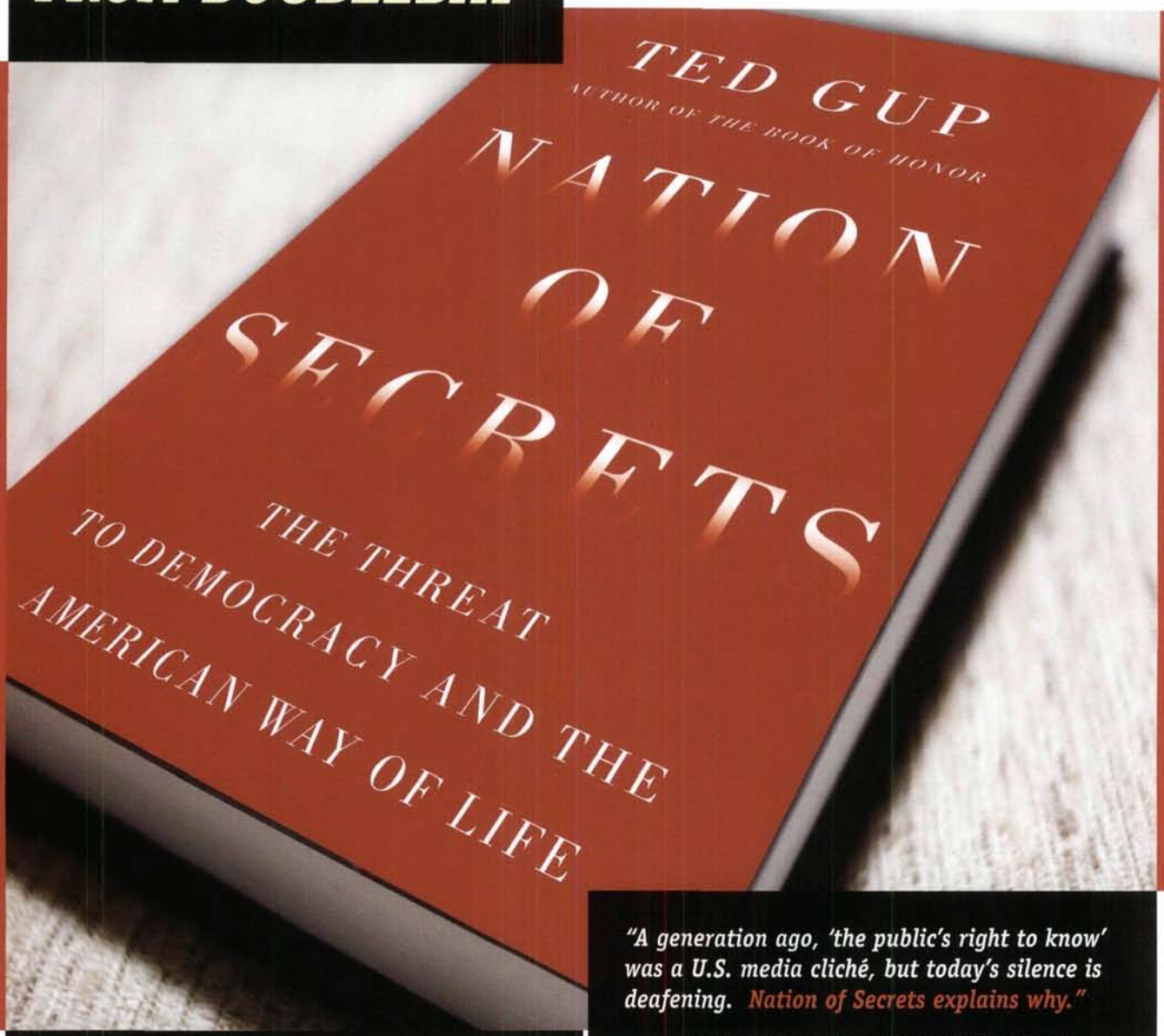

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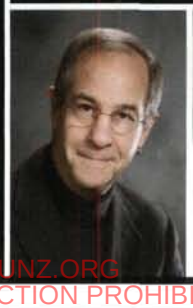

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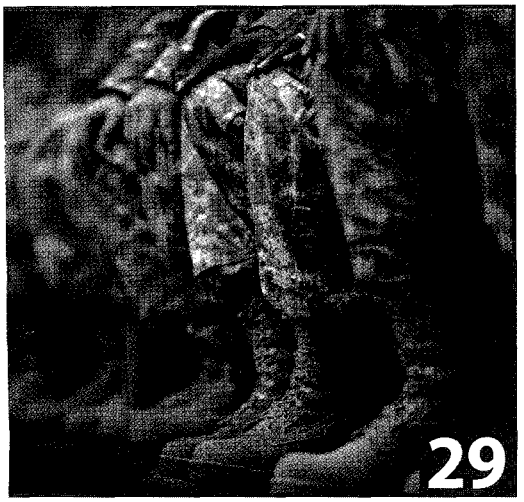

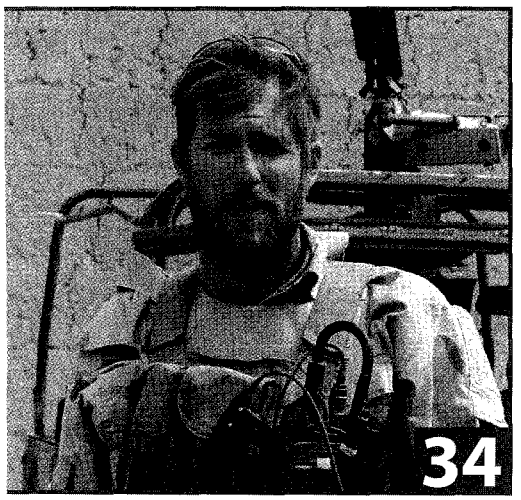

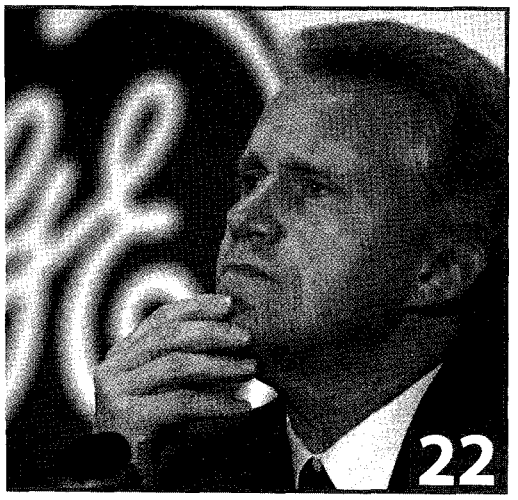

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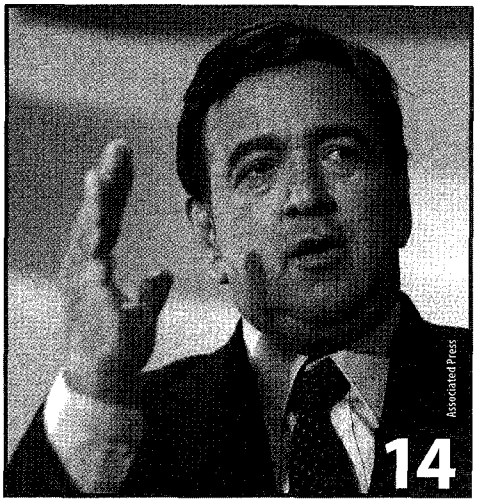

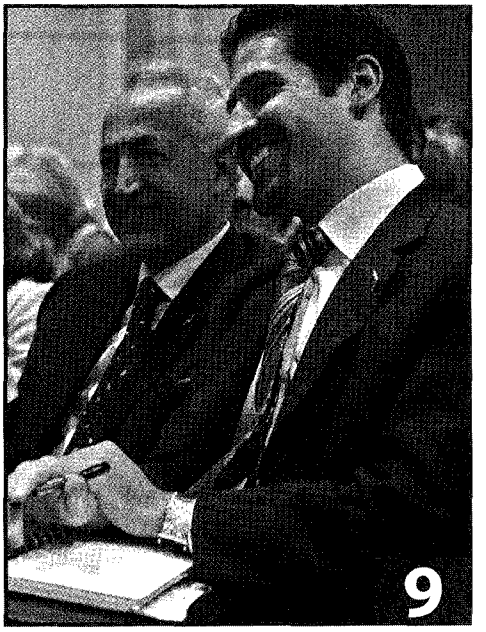

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Editor's Note

PAUL GLASTRIS

The Last Wars We Won

When I was a kid during Vietnam, I remember hearing some of my father's friends—like him, World War II vets who voted Republican—scornfully declare that they had served during "the last war we won." It was a not-too-subtle swipe at the Democrats for failing to achieve victory in a war they had started.

These days, as we watch the United States stumble through another slow-motion defeat, I find myself incredulous that the Democrats don't regularly invoke the last wars America did, in fact, win: Bosnia and Kosovo.

Most Americans probably don't remember the precise outcomes of—much less the circumstances leading up to—those small Balkan conflicts. But I can't forget them. I covered the end of the war in Bosnia as a reporter and was a speechwriter in the Clinton White House during Kosovo. In both cases it was clear, at least to me and my Balkan-obsessed friends, that Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic was engineering ethnic slaughter for his own political ends; that both conflicts, happening in the same country that sparked World War I, could spill over into neighboring states; and that Europe, by itself, was incapable of ending the violence.

America, in my opinion, had no option but to get involved militarily. But much of the national security establishment wasn't so sure, because the prospects for success seemed so grim. Religious and ethnic enmities in Yugoslavia were, if anything, worse than those in Iraq (at least until recently). At home, Clinton faced a far tougher political environment than Bush later would on the eve of the Iraq War: a hostile Congress controlled by the opposite party; a military that deeply distrusted him; and a pre-9/11 voting public that did not feel that the security of the nation was threatened in any direct way. The administration compounded these problems with a series of mistakes—from its initial half-hearted effort to sell the Europeans on a military strategy for Bosnia to underestimating Milosevic's resolve to hold on to Kosovo.

And yet both conflicts ended with impressive military victories. In Bosnia in the summer of 1995, Croat and Muslim ground troops, armed (and, in the case of the Croats, trained) with tacit U.S. government support, routed the Serbs in southern Croatia and eastern Bosnia, while U.S.-led NATO air and naval forces pounded Bosnian Serb military positions with smart bombs and Tomahawk missiles. That one-two punch forced Milosevic to sue for peace at the Dayton Accords. Then, in March 1999, after 300,000 Kosovar Albanians had been driven from their homes by Serb troops fighting Kosovo Liberation Army guerillas, NATO launched another air war, this time hitting Kosovo and Serbia proper. Seventy-eight days later, Milosevic pulled his forces out of Kosovo.

We achieved these victories—whether by luck, skill, planning, or some combination—without the loss of a single American soldier's life in combat. Most important of all, we won the peace, deploying multinational occupation forces sizable and robust enough to keep a tense but reasonably democratic order—an order that holds to this day. As for Milosevic: he was forced from power the next year by a nonviolent democratic mass movement and sent to The Hague, where he died in 2006.

To put this achievement in perspective: no Democratic president since FDR has launched and won a war. Clinton won two. That's a hell of a record, and one you'd expect would be embraced by a party that has struggled to convince voters of its capacity to lead on national security. Yet while Democrats will occasionally invoke the Bosnian and Kosovo peacekeeping operations as a way of criticizing the botched Iraq occupation, you almost never hear them talk about Bosnia and Kosovo as military victories per se.

In some sense, this is understandable: these victories did not really feel very triumphal at the time (except perhaps to the men and women in uniform who carried out the missions). They were wars almost nobody was psyched for, that were fought—on our end anyway—from 30,000 feet in the air, over stakes that were not—again, for us—existential in nature. Even the White House had trouble finding the right words to express what we had achieved. The day Milosevic started pulling his troops out of Kosovo, the NSC produced a draft of the speech the president would deliver that evening in prime time. It included, if memory serves, about a dozen mentions of Europe but not one use of the word "victory." The political side of the White House pushed back, and with the president's

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approval the speech was punched up—on the teleprompter, about ten minutes before he went live before the nation.

But if the Balkan victories lacked a certain political frisson, can you imagine today's Republicans being blasé about them had they occurred during a GOP presidency? Of course not. They'd talk them up incessantly.

So should Democrats. After all, there's a reason these victories happened on a Democrat's watch. They were the result of a strategy based on liberal principles: that you go to war with profound reluctance, only after all other options have been exhausted, all points of view heard, all evidence weighed, and all necessary allies brought on board.

Democrats often talk about these principles, but mostly in the abstract or as part of their critique of Bush and the neocons, and so they tend to sound either airy or carping. The problem, I think, is that Democrats fail to connect, even in their own minds, the principles they believe in with the only actual recent evidence for their soundness: our victories in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Would talking more about these victories stir the passions of average voters, most of whom barely remember the Balkan wars? Probably not. But there's another audience that I think might be more receptive: the military.

The uniformed services were, for the most part, skeptical at best about the missions they were given in the Balkans. There was much grumbling, especially among the officer corps, which by then had become almost tribally Republican, that postconflict occupations were undermining readiness and keeping soldiers from training for their "real" mission, which is to fight big wars against serious enemies. The thinking was that Bosnia and Kosovo were the kind of candy-ass humanitarian assignments you get when there's a liberal in the White House. The Bush campaign in 2000 deftly exploited that resentment. As Condoleezza Rice put it: "We don't need to have the 82nd Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten."

Now, after four tough years in Iraq, and five and a half in Afghanistan, nobody in uniform thinks peacekeeping and nation-building missions are something only Democrats order up. They know that whether they like it or not, such operations are likely to come their way again (say, to stop a genocide in oil-rich Nigeria, or stabilize North Korea if the current regime collapses) no matter who's president.

Given this awareness, Democrats need to offer men and women in uniform a simple proposition: If you want your next war to end up like Iraq, vote Republican, but if you want it to turn out more like Kosovo, vote for us.

That's my advice, anyway. But I'm not a soldier. If you want to know what members of the military are really thinking about war, politics, and the next election, you have to ask them. And so we did. In this month's cover package, seven recent war veterans respond to the question "What can a Democrat say to get my vote?" I think you'll find their answers fascinating. WM

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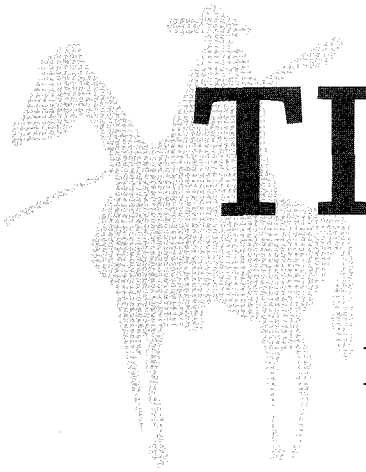

TILTING *at windmills*

By Charles Peters

Thanks for no memories

After hearing Alberto Gonzales uttering the words "I don't recall," "I have no recollection," or "I have no memory" sixty-four times during his April 19 testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, and pondering the fact that Gonzales's former chief of staff, Kyle Sampson, had said "I don't remember" 122 times before the same committee three weeks earlier, the *Washington Post*'s Dana Milbank suggested that the Justice Department might want to consider serving ginkgo biloba at the employee cafeteria.

The forgetfulness defense

It seems that Gonzales and Sampson may well have gotten their bad-memory defense from the same source who told them who to fire and hire, namely, Karl Rove. You will recall that Rove managed to escape a perjury charge in the Valerie Plame case by returning to the grand jury to correct his previous testimony that he hadn't talked to Matt Cooper, and declaring that he had simply forgotten the incident at the time of his first appearance before the jury. His memory had been "refreshed" after his lawyer learned from a pal at *Time* that Cooper planned to tell the jury that Rove had been his source. Rove's attorney, Robert Luskin, in a stunning display of persuasive advocacy, managed to sell this defense to Patrick Fitzgerald.

The ignorance defense

Now Luskin is using a variant of the defense to deflect accusations that Rove had anything to do with the Republican National Committee's deletion of his e-mails that might have shown his role in Justice Department personnel decisions. Instead of "I forgot," the defense is now "I never knew." Luskin tells the *Post*'s Michael Abramowitz that not only did Rove not know the messages had been deleted but that he has always understood "that his RNC and campaign emails were being archived from very early in the administration." What is so impressive about this defense is that it can't be disproved.

> I've been dismayed by the misunderstandings of neoliberalism on the part of people as smart as David Brooks.

After Adlai

"He doesn't have the handicap that a lot of smart people have, which is that they come across as 'You're not smart enough to talk to me,'" a friend of Barack Obama's tells the *New Yorker*'s Larissa MacFarquhar. In that sense, the friend says, Obama is the "opposite" of Adlai Stevenson.

I can't tell you how those words delighted me. I've long thought the Democrats began to lose their bearings in the 1950s, when they began to value seeming smarter than the next guy over seeing themselves as equals and talking to the rest of us with down-to-earth common sense.

My father, like many other Democrats of the thirties and forties, thought of himself as "a common man." Indeed, a liberal leader of that era even wrote a book called *The Century of the Common Man,* a term that disappeared from the Democratic vocabulary with Stevenson's emergence. But in the thirties and forties, men like my father valued the plain speaking of their heroes—Will Rogers, Franklin Roosevelt, and Harry Truman, who cared more about making themselves clear to the average American than showing how smart they were. And instead of feeling superior, as liberal intellectuals are especially prone to do, they could reach out to find common ground. That's what we must do if we're ever going to win anything like the five straight elections that Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman won.

An admission about admissions

I must say that I feel sorry for Marilee Jones, the MIT admissions director who recently resigned after admitting that she had lied about her credentials twenty-eight years ago. Certainly she shouldn't have done that. But now that she has performed the admissions job more than successfully for

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all that time, hasn't she proved that she is qualified? We put far too much emphasis on the possession of degrees compared to demonstrated ability. My favorite example was when Paul Blair was denied the opportunity to coach a high school baseball team because he didn't have an education degree, even though he just happened to have been a Major League player.

Only in New York

I'm reminded of a conversation I had years ago with the late *New Yorker* writer Michael Arlen. I was telling him that the thing I liked about small towns in contrast to New York was that in New York, you encountered a lot of people who lied about or concealed facts about their background. In small towns, people know everything about you, so their judgments about you are based on what you really are. I liked that. It's better to know everything about each other than not to know what to believe.

But Arlen pointed out that many people come to New York to get a new start. And, though it might not be admirable for them to lie about their backgrounds to get the break they need, the new start could give them the chance to prove their ability. As I've grown older and have become aware of the many talented people in New York—and in Los Angeles, where self-reinvention is also rampant—who have used embroidered resumes to get the opportunity to show what they could do, I became more forgiving, especially of those who proved to be able to do what they said they could do. The song "New York, New York" says that if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere; maybe it needs to be amended to say that you may *only* be able to make it there.

> If you voted for Bush, you have to chalk it up as one of the worst mistakes of your life. And if it wasn't the absolute worst, you must have made some real lulus.

What neoliberals really think

I've been dismayed by the misunderstandings of neoliberalism that I've encountered lately on the part of people as smart as David Brooks. So I've decided to make an attempt to more fully explain our beliefs, a regular feature of this column. One example in which our views appear to be more widely adopted is abortion, which we've long regarded as a legal right but a moral choice. The legal right part used to anger conservatives, while the emphasis on the moral choice upset many abortion advocates. But now an increasing number of liberals seem to be moving toward our point of view, as well as at least a few conservatives.

On defense, we've preached the need to be prepared with the best weapons and tactics for the military actions we're likely to have to take. Our concern for being ready to use force does not imply an eagerness to do so. We think it only very rarely justified—as it was in the case of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in 2001. Far more often, we feel that diplomacy can attain our legitimate ends, especially when it is backed up by credible military power. This approach, we believe, could have avoided both wars against Iraq.

On criminal justice, we applaud getting violent criminals off the street, and the resulting decline in violent crime. At the same time, however, I think most neoliberals would be horrified by the news that California is planning to spend $8.3 billion to add 53,000 beds to its prisons. The prisons we already have are more than adequate to take care of the violent. All of those extra beds are being built to take care of the nonviolent, too many of whom are serving absurdly long sentences. My experience as a criminal lawyer in the 1950s convinced me that short sentences or probation are usually the best way to deal with the nonviolent, with probation almost always best for first offenders.

Washington Monthly alumnus Jason DeParle points out in a recent article in the *New York Review of Books* that there are now seven people out of every 1,000 in jail or prison today compared to one in 1,000 at the beginning of the century. Our rate of incarceration is also seven times that of the average Western European country.

Among the disturbing effects of this overuse of imprisonment on the rest of us, even those disinclined to sympathy for the incarcerated, is the "1.5 million people who are released from prisons and jails each year with an infectious disease—tuberculosis, hepatitis, HIV and drug-resistant staph infections." As for the former inmates themselves, the impact of their record on employment is dramatic. "The disclosure of a prison record reduced the chances of getting a second interview by half for whites and by two-thirds for blacks," writes DeParle.

You can see why we favor alternatives to jail for the nonviolent. And although we value having the violent kept off the streets as long as they are dangerous, that time is not as long as most sentences now extend, ending in the mid-thirties for most.

Neoliberals don't agree on everything. Jason opposes capital punishment. I favor it, but only for the monsters like Ted Bundy, and only when the proof goes beyond eliminating reasonable doubt and reaches virtual certainty.

Overextended ...

Sergeant Edelman Hernandez had completed his four-year enlistment in March. At twenty-three, he had a long life to look forward to, a future in which he could achieve his dreams. But even though he had completed his enlistment, including one year of combat in Iraq and another in Afghanistan, he was not allowed to come home. The U.S. Army is so short of manpower that Hernandez, like thousands of

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other soldiers, was "retained." On April 11, he drowned while his unit was crossing a deep river in Afghanistan.

... and underprepared

On February 2, Private Matthew Zeimer was killed in Iraq. He had been there exactly one week, after just nine weeks of basic training, and what *Time*'s Mark Thompson describes as a "cut-rate, ten-day course in weapons use, first aid and Iraqi culture" which, Thompson adds, is the "same length as the course that teaches soldiers assigned to generals' household staff the finer points of table service."

By contrast, after three and a quarter years of World War II, I can testify that infantry basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama, was sixteen weeks. I know because I was there.

Why we fight

Practically everyone now knows that the Army is stretched far too thin. By last December, Colin Powell was already saying that "the active army is about broken." Combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan are being extended to fifteen months, with many soldiers returning for a heartbreaking third tour. Two American units are returning to Iraq after not having even a year at home. Equipment is as worn out as the troops. All this in a desperate attempt to save the reputations of Bush and Cheney. Never forget what Cheney said when asked why he had not served in Vietnam. "I had other priorities." And never forget all those reporters who were conned by Karl Rove into giving more ink to questioning John Kerry's actual life-risking service in Vietnam than to questioning George Bush's evasion of serving there.

How someone develops an interest in dinosaur bones

Why did the head of the Smithsonian, Lawrence Small, and his deputy, Sheila Burke, want to serve on the board of directors of the Chubb Group insurance company? Compensation of more than $100,000 each may have had something to do with it. Why did Chubb want them on the board? That may have had something to do with Chubb getting more than a half a million a year in insurance payments from the Smithsonian.

Board games

Motivation for board service fascinates me, especially where in contrast to the Smithsonian case there appears to be little or no compensation for the board members, which is often true with charitable or educational institutions. You begin to get a glimmer when you hear one board member say about another, "Roger is so good at handling our finances. He's a VP at First National, you know," and you happen to find out that the organization's funds are deposited at First National. Or suppose that Roger is a lawyer, and you hear another member of the board, who happens to be the CEO of a large company, say, "We're so lucky to have Roger. He gives such sound advice." The light begins to dawn when the CEO adds, "As a matter of fact, we're going to ask Roger to be our corporate counsel."

> We applaud getting violent criminals off the street, but what we deplore is putting the nonviolent away for long sentences.

That's what I call a commission

A recent Israeli government report on Israel's attack on Lebanon last fall condemns Prime Minister Ehud Olmert for a "serious failure of exercising judgment, responsibility and prudence" in attacking Lebanon and criticizes Minister of Defense Amir Peretz for not grasping "the basic principles of using military force to achieve political goals." The commission could have been talking about Bush and Rumsfeld.

How labor got less interesting

Speaking of the media, David Carr of the *New York Times* recently pointed out that when Circuit City announced it was laying off 3,400 sales clerks, his paper published only "a wire report inside its business section," and the *Wall Street Journal* ran "a brief on B4." Carr adds that only four of the top twenty-five papers in this country have reporters assigned to the labor beat. The *Times* itself has increasingly become devoted to the interests of the upper classes. Not only is much of the paper's advertising directed at the more affluent, but even more important, a large number of its editors and reporters and their spouses are now earning in excess of $200,000, and are firmly part of the upper middle class.

This helps explain why the *Times* has joined the crusade against the alternative minimum tax. In the words of the *Times* editorial page, "most people who will owe the tax make between $200,000 and $500,000," and if you read the editorial carefully, you will learn that "most" means more than three-quarters.

It has to be a little bit worrisome that so much of the most influential media—including the *Times*, the *New Yorker*, and *Vanity Fair*—depend on advertising that appeals to the well-heeled, and that much of their editorial staff belongs in the same economic group. If they question the wealthy, it is only the "very richest," as the *Times* puts it.

FDA warning

A word of caution for Senator Edward Kennedy. He is working with Senator Mike Enzi of Wyoming on a largely laudable bill to improve FDA oversight of drugs. What worries me about the bill is that it not only fails to improve the FDA's grossly inadequate system of food inspection but that it continues the FDA's

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David Halberstam 1934–2007

The announcement of our political book award for 1972 featured a drawing by Vint Lawrence of David Halberstam and two other authors, but the accompanying article did not mention Halberstam. How could such an absurdity have happened?

I had devoured *The Best and the Brightest*, and, having decided that it should at the very least share the award, commissioned the art from Vint. While he was working, two of our young editors lodged a powerful protest against giving the award to Halberstam. Thus, we had a drawing of Halberstam without an award for Halberstam.

Although there have been many times in the history of the *Monthly* that I have thanked the Lord for the young people who have tackled me before I crossed the wrong goal line, this was not one of them. I was mortified. I kept looking for ways to atone. And when the publisher of the *New York Times* decreed that Russell Baker had to leave our editorial advisory board, I offered David his place. He was forgiving enough to accept. We were honored. He was, quite simply, one of the very best journalists of the twentieth century. —*C.P.*

reliance on fees from pharmaceutical companies to finance its drug reviews.

Enormous lobbying power will be directed against any effort to make the FDA more effective. Thus, FDA reform is a major test of Democrats' ability to free themselves from the clutches of K Street.

The mistake that keeps on giving

After reading for a month about the disgraceful student loan scandals, it was dismaying to pick up the May 1 *Washington Post* and learn from Amit R. Paley that six years ago, the Bush administration killed a proposal generated by the Department of Education in the last days of the Clinton administration to reform the student loan industry by eliminating many of the dubious practices that have recently been revealed. If you voted for Bush, you have to chalk it up as one of the worst mistakes of your life. And if it wasn't the absolute worst, you must have made some real lulus.

Water would have been helpful

One of the loveliest government buildings in Washington, the Georgetown branch of the D.C. public library, was gutted by fire on April 30. One factor in the fire's rapid spread, revealed in the next day's *Washington Post*, was that "two of the fire hydrants closest to the library were not functioning." This prompted me to ask, how many times have I seen fire hydrants being checked? The answer: in the forty-five years I've lived in our house on a street with one fire hydrant, I have only seen it being checked twice.

Although all of us are grateful to firefighters for the bravery and skill they often display in dealing with danger, I wonder why they can't check hydrants more often. After all, their moments of peril punctuate long stretches of sitting around the station playing cards and watching television. Why can't some of that downtime be used for regular inspection of hydrants?

The bathroom diaries

Jane E. Brody of the *New York Times* recently embraced a cause dear to all of us senior citizens, the need for more public toilets in our cities. Brody points to Sydney, Australia, where, on a recent visit, she found "public toilets, lots of them, clean, neat, safe, free of graffiti, working flushes and faucets, and well-stocked with toilet paper."

This paradise will, I fear, be a long time coming to the United States. In the meantime, I endorse a tactic recommended by Brody: Walk into the nearest restaurant and head for the restroom. If interrupted by a head waiter who says the facilities are for customers only, proclaim a state of emergency. I find that the look on my face of genuine desperation always gets me by.

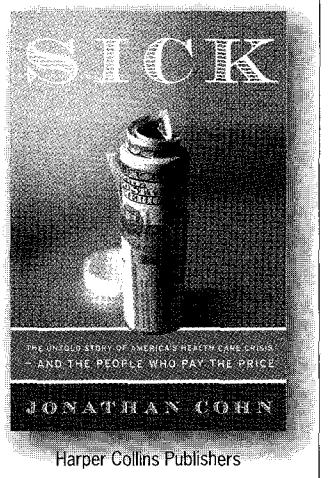
It is also wise to make a mental map of the exact location of toilets in restaurants, hotels, stores, and public buildings in the areas that you frequent in your city. When you're going out of town, Brody suggests you consult www.thebathroomdiaries.com for a list of toilets in the cities you plan to visit.

In this case, it's best to follow the old Boy Scout motto: Be prepared. WM

Charles Peters is the founding editor of the *Washington Monthly* and the president of Understanding Government, a nonprofit dedicated to better government through better reporting.

Dēmos Books

New from Demos Senior Fellow
Jonathan Cohn



Harper Collins Publishers

OF ALL THE FORMS OF INEQUALITY, INJUSTICE IN HEALTH CARE IS THE MOST SHOCKING AND INHUMANE.

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

www.demos.org

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TEN MILES SQUARE

"... such District (not exceeding ten Miles square) ... [shall] become the Seat of the Government of the United States"
THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

The Scion

Kurdistan's man in Washington

By Laura Rozen

Qubad Talabani is one of those cultural anomalies who somehow seem like natural creatures of Washington. Few twenty-nine-year-olds are trusted to serve as the top envoy of a foreign entity to the United States, as Talabani—the son of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani—is by Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government. But Talabani—slim, goateed, English-accented, a onetime Italian-car mechanic with an American wife—handles his duties with aplomb, rushing around town in subtle suits to meet with policy makers and power brokers. His most distinctive attribute may be that he represents perhaps the sole triumph to emerge from postwar Iraq: a relatively peaceful region free of foreign troops, eager for American protection and open for business.

On a sunny April afternoon, I meet Talabani at the KRG's simple second-floor I Street offices, two blocks from the White House. Inside, the plain white walls are adorned with Ottoman-style silver filigreed decorations, colorful woven saddlebags, and Kurdish paintings. On a side table in the foyer sits a photograph of Talabani *père* with President Bush in the Oval Office.

As the photograph suggests, the Kurds currently find their interests closely aligned with those of the Bush administration. They want American troops to stay in Iraq and fear that any near-term drawdown would trigger greater instability. These days, Talabani is having little trouble selling a simple message around town: "Kurdistan is a success story," he explains to me. "Kurdistan is stable, prosperous, economically viable ... We've built a strong civil society in the heart of the Islamic Middle East, surrounded by tough neighbors." He adds—and here comes the pitch: "But we can't succeed without the support of the world's only superpower."

Talabani is hardly the first cosmopolitan, culturally dexterous representative of a foreign interest to find his cause in vogue in the halls of American government. The Iraqi exile leader Ahmad Chalabi was also a charismatic, effective Washington advocate, who systematically persuaded influential constituencies, and ultimately the Bush administration, to lend the U.S. Army to his longtime struggle against Saddam Hussein. But Qubad is different. He's of a younger generation, more pragmatic than idealistic, less enmeshed in neoconservative Republican politics and with less of the seductive con-man qualities of the old master. "We have friends on the Democratic and Republican sides," Talabani says. "It is not our game to play American politics. Chalabi did that and failed. We are not taking sides."

Yet although the soft-spoken Talabani is a far less polarizing figure than Chalabi, his intentions are complex. On the one hand, Kurdish political leaders are currently the glue in the American project to hold a unitary Iraq together. On the other hand, many of the positions Talabani advocates in Washington are feared by non-Kurdish Iraqis, and Iraq's neighbors, as being incremental steps toward Kurdish secession. For instance, foremost on Talabani's agenda at the moment is Kirkuk, the ethnically mixed city that Kurds con-

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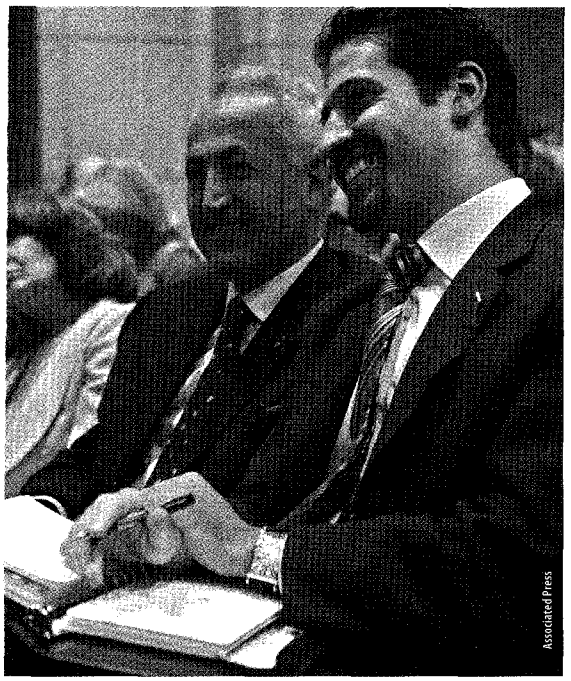
sider their Jerusalem. Talabani is pushing the U.S. government hard to honor a provision in the Iraqi constitution calling for a referendum on the city's status before the end of the year. Iraqi non-Kurds and Turkey oppose the referendum fiercely, and experts warn that both parties could react violently should the city be placed under Kurdish control. In April, the nonpartisan International Crisis Group recommended the referendum be postponed to avoid "the risk of an explosion." The question that surrounds Talabani and the Kurds is whether their current support for U.S. efforts in Iraq is simply a calculated, tactical move in a long-term play for greater independence.


Associated Press

Smooth Operator: Qubad Talabani has found there's no geopolitical argument that can't be sharpened by a few million dollars in high-powered lobbying.

Qubad Talabani hails from Kurdish political aristocracy. His maternal grandfather, Ibrahim Ahmad, was the first chairman of the ur Iraqi Kurdish political party, the Kurdish Democratic Party. Qubad's father, Jalal, the former peshmerga commander turned statesman, is the longtime head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and became president of Iraq in 2005. He is known as the grand old man of the Kurdish political movement and for having what former Ambassador Peter Galbraith, a longtime advocate of the Iraqi Kurds, has described as a "large appetite for knowledge and for food."

Qubad was raised in exile in England by his maternal grandparents, in a home filled with Kurdish intellectuals and political activists. "We were always around politics, there were always meetings in the house ... [in] smoke-filled rooms," he told me. However, Talabani spent much of his teens avoiding the pull of Kurdish politics, instead working as a mechanic on Italian cars. Then, seven years ago, after graduating from Britain's Surrey University with a degree in automotive engineering, he decided that he wasn't so interested in working in the automotive industry.

So in 2000, he came to Washington. First, he worked in the PUK's small Capitol Hill–area offices, then headed by Barham Salih, who is now Iraq's deputy prime minister. Later, he was made the head of the PUK office. And last year, in an agreement between the two main Iraqi Kurdish political parties, the KDP and the PUK, he became the Washington face of the entire Kurdistan Regional Government. Along the way, the young diplomat married the State Department's Iraq Desk officer. ("At our wedding," Talabani remarks mischievously, "Peter Galbraith said, 'When I told you to get close to the State Department, I did not mean to get *that* close.'")

The Kurdish relationship with Washington hasn't always been so cordial. When the Kurds were gassed by Saddam Hussein in 1988, the United States did nothing. "There was nobody standing up for them, almost nobody," says Galbraith. When Jalal Talabani visited the State Department on his first trip to Washington in April 1988, Galbraith describes, it provoked such a vociferous reaction from Turkey and Iraq that Kurdish leaders were banned until 1991 from returning.

The United States' views slowly changed, largely thanks to the efforts of Dr. Najmaldin Karim, a Kurdish physician who tended to Ronald Reagan at George Washington Hospital after he was shot by an assassin. Over the course of the 1990s, Karim is credited with single-handedly creating D.C.'s Kurdish lobby. More recently, as the situation has deteriorated in Iraq, the Kurds have found themselves increasingly popular here. "Quite frankly, the Kurds are the element that is keeping Iraq together," says a former Coalition Provisional Authority official.

But Washington's attention—and money—tends to be consumed by the less peaceful regions of Iraq. Talabani and his compatriots, however, have learned that there's no geopolitical argument that can't be sharpened by a few million dollars in high-powered lobbying. Since 2004, the KRG has employed the Bush White House–connected lobbying firm Barbour Griffith & Rogers, signing up two top-dollar partners who know their way around the West Wing: Ed Rogers, a former deputy assistant to the president in the Bush I White House, and Robert Blackwill, a former National Security Council envoy on Iraq for the current Bush administration. The bill has run well over a million dollars so far, covering the bases at the Defense Department, the State Department, Treasury, the White House, the National Security Council, the House, and the Senate.

These lobbying efforts have already been credited with securing the Kurds a larger share of U.S. aid. "I love this town," Talabani tells me over lunch at an art gallery café near his office. "If you can't get in the door, you go through the window. If that's shut, you go through the chimney; if that's blocked, you sneak into the basement." (Later, I realize that he gave a similar quote to the *Washington Post*.) In the process, Talabani has gained a reputation as a skilled advocate for his cause. "Qubad is generally recognized as an artful, convincing representative of the Kurdish Regional Government," says the former CPA official. "He understands Washington, D.C., quite well ... Given the constraints of resources and the fact that the U.S. is so heavily focused on Iraq, the

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KRG has done a rather good job."

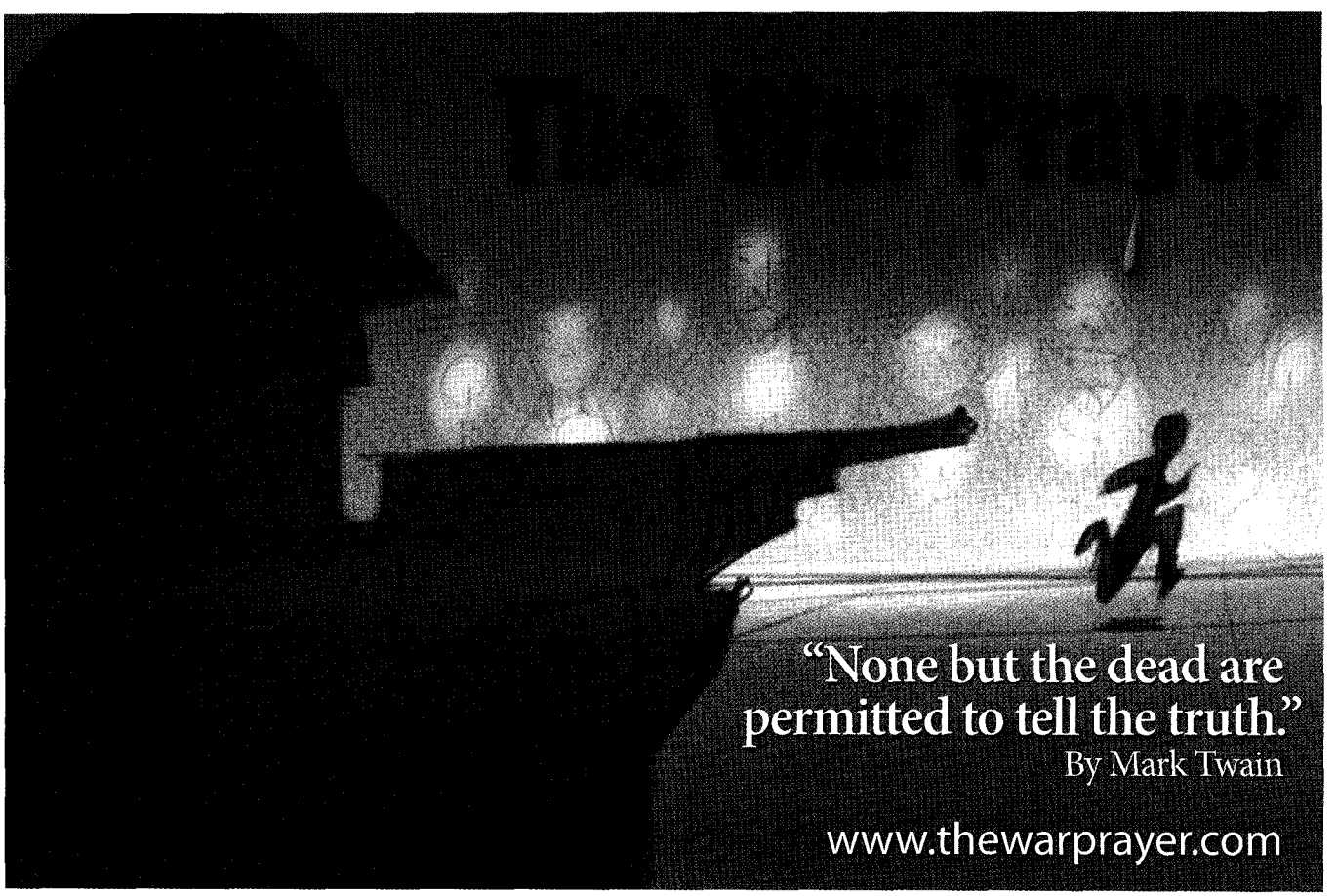
Talabani is hoping to achieve similar successes on the issue of Kirkuk. The city was "Arabized" under Saddam Hussein, and also has a significant ethnic Turkish Turkoman population. "Kirkuk is the symbol of our tragedy and oppression," says Talabani. It also sits on lots of oil and natural gas. As a result, the referendum—which is expected to transfer the city to Kurdish control if held—is fiercely opposed by Iraqi non-Kurds, as well as by Turkey, which considers itself the protector of the Turkoman minority and fears the emergence of an economically empowered Kurdistan on its border.

Given the threat of unrest in the one part of Iraq that is relatively stable, the State Department seems inclined to kick this issue down the road. But Talabani is not ready to cede the argument yet. For instance, although he does not openly suggest a quid pro quo, he hints that if the referendum is delayed, the Kurds may not be inclined to support a law ensuring central government control and revenue sharing of Iraq's oil wealth, which Washington considers critical to Iraq's political reconciliation. At least some Iraq watchers believe that Talabani may yet get his way. "The U.S. has found it very hard to go against stuff in the [Iraqi] constitution," said Patrick Clawson, a Middle East expert and deputy director of research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "I am not as convinced that this [referendum] can be easily postponed."

The Kurdish rumor mill has it that Jalal Talabani may soon wish to recall Qubad to Kurdistan to groom him for a political future there. Qubad was equal parts diplomat and good soldier when asked about such plans: "Not really being groomed," he e-mails after our interview. "As for ever going back to Kurdistan, my roots are there, and my cause is there, so I can imagine living/working there at some point." In the meantime, his lobbying efforts on Kirkuk may help determine whether the Kurdistan he returns to is at war or at peace. WM

The question that surrounds Talabani is whether his current support for U.S. efforts in Iraq is simply a calculated, tactical move in a long-term play for greater independence.

Laura Rozen is a national security correspondent for the *Washington Monthly*.



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Help Wanted

The *Washington Monthly* obtains applications for the job of White House war czar.

It was recently reported that National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley is seeking a "czar" to oversee the war in Iraq. At least three retired four-star generals have already declined to be considered for the position, causing Mr. Hadley to post the following vacancy announcement and to grant us exclusive access to the most promising responses. (Names are redacted to protect the confidentiality of the applicants.)

IMPLEMENTATION AND EXECUTION MANAGER
EXECUTIVE BRANCH, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Description:

Self-starter wanted to lead two-front global conflict. The "Overseer" will report directly to the Decider, who will report to the Vice President.

Successful applicants will be able to:

- Maintain healthy contractor P/E ratios.
- Devise and execute a plan of strategic obfuscation to present to multiple constituencies, including media and Congress.
- Remove insurgents in Iraq, Afghanistan, and within the administration.

Motivated individuals will also have the opportunity to spread the war into a country of their own choosing.

Requirements:

- Experience in waging military campaigns preferred.
- Experience in waging political campaigns accepted.
- Participation in the Nixon administration a plus.

Compensation:

An excellent package will be designed to attract the best candidate, including a competitive government salary, and benefits including but not limited to:

- Presidential Medal of Freedom.
- Personalized nickname.
- Framed signed photograph of Senator Joseph Lieberman (one).

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U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Sir,

I am currently the head of a large government agency, but may be seeking new opportunities shortly. Having swiftly and nearly successfully purged a deeply entrenched army of qualified professionals from within my bureaucracy, I seek to do the same against insurgents. I have extensive experience in engendering recommendations based on a process of aggregating the opinions of knowledgeable experts. When that doesn't work, my general posture is to defer to the White House.

Furthermore, I'm adept at using the following three phrases: "I don't recall," "I've done nothing wrong," and there's a third one I don't recall at the moment.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

1 Sadr Drive
Sadr City, Iraq

Infidel Swine,

You want to return Iraq to the Iraqis. I want to return Iraq to the Iraqis. I will provide my own Mahdi Army to do so. Give to me this job of yours, and your soldiers will be able to return home with their mongrel dog tails between their legs, as your people wish.

Inshallah,

[redacted]

General Delivery
St. Michaels, MD 21663

Steve,

As you know, I don't do quagmires. You also know that I have run wars that were successful in my eyes and those of the President. In fact, when I left my previous job, the mission had been accomplished. In this job, you need someone concepty. And goodness gracious, I'm concepty.

You also need consistency. I'm a man who believes what I've said all along. If I don't know what I said, I certainly know what I think, and I assume it's what I said.

Finally, you've got to fill a job with the applicants you have, not the applicants you wish you had. That leaves me.

As Tenet would say—and I'm telling you he did say it—it's a slam dunk.

[redacted]

Iraqi National Congress
London, United Kingdom

My most trusted friend,

It has been far too long since we last spoke. I understand that for the sake of appearances we had to keep our distance. But remember our dream and my destiny, deciding Iraq's fate without actually having to be in Iraq.

This is that opportunity, that moment in history, for me to finish what I've begun, and live up to the honorable title my friends in your administration have bestowed upon me: Iraq's George Washington.

I await the pleasure of your reply,

[redacted]

FROM: justinb365@yahoo.com

TO: shadley@aol.com

This job sounds AWESOME. I'm a Junior at Westlake High School and my dad has been all over me for not having a summer job yet. But then I saw this posted on Monster and thought, like, how kick-ass would this be for me? I'm already a level-70 Paladin in World of Warcraft, and everyone says I have mad skills at Metroid Prime 3 on my Nintendo Wii. If you need references or something, text me.

TTYL,

[redacted]

Jeff Nussbaum is a principal in the speechwriting and strategy firm West Wing Writers. **Eric Schnure** is a freelance speechwriter and an adjunct professor at American University. **Dan Goor** is an Emmy Award–winning writer for *Late Night With Conan O'Brien*. They write collectively as the **Humor Cabinet**, and can be reached at comments@humorcabinet.com.

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THE *Monthly* INTERVIEW

Bill Richardson

Only one of the 2008 presidential candidates is Hispanic, and only one has held a top foreign policy position in a former administration. Conveniently, it's the same person in both cases. Bill Richardson, the Democratic governor of New Mexico, grew up in Mexico City. At various times, he has been a congressman, a secretary of energy, and a UN ambassador. (Richardson himself has likened his diplomatic career to serving as the "undersecretary for thugs," referring to tough negotiations with the likes of Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong Il). His resume gives him a unique perspective on the United States' rather choppy relations with much of Latin America, where anti-American populists have been faring well in national elections. The *Washington Monthly*'s **Peter Laufer** and **Markos Kounalakis** recently asked Governor Richardson what has gone wrong and how he'd go about mending some fences.

WM: It's often said that this administration has lost Latin America. Why is this happening?

BR: We have lost touch with a very important region. American foreign policy, especially in this administration, concentrates on Iraq, and then Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, but not our own hemisphere. That's one problem. The second is the failure to enact an immigration bill, because this doesn't affect just Mexico, it affects many Central American and Caribbean countries. The third point is that we don't get involved with democratic populist movements in the region. We let Hugo Chavez take over on energy, we let Chavez get more political support with democratic movements in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. Those are our strong allies, but their presidents don't like us too much because of Iraq and other negative policies we've pursued.

WM: But all of these perceived anti-American results in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Chile, and Brazil don't have to be negative, if we take a more nuanced and sophisticated approach to what is going on. Is that correct?

BR: We've become identified with trade agreements that have not been pro-people. I think there is a great opportunity for cooperation on things like education and renewable energy with Latin American countries like Brazil. Instead, we promote these big policies that concentrate on building big highways and bridges and create debt, instead of entrepreneurial programs that help people, nutrition, education, and energy. You can have free trade agreements with these countries, but they have to be respectful of issues of environmental quality and wage disparity and labor protection. Instead we have these lopsided agreements that just involve big infrastructures and big markets. We should also be using our economic and trade policy to foster democratic institutions.

WM: You mentioned Brazil using cleaner energies. Hasn't Brazil become nearly energy independent in the last few years?

BR: They virtually are, and the transformation was through a huge ethanol commitment. What we need to talk about is, how can our region and the United States cooperate in technologies that deal with solar wind, biomass, biodiesels, biofuels—instead of increasing the dependence on petroleum? This is one area where we can fight Chavez, who just has ideological motives. Somebody said to me, "I can't believe you would talk to Chavez!" I would talk to Chavez. You can't just isolate everybody.

WM: You mentioned that immigration can't be ignored. As a governor of a border state, and now a candidate for the presidency, what's your solution?

BR: You have to enhance border security, but not this stupid fence that Congress has passed. That is a terrible symbol—plus, it is not going to work. But security is one step. You also

Associated Press

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have to have a legalization of the 12 million who are here, if they speak English, pass background checks, pay taxes, and embrace American values. What else are you going to do, deport everybody? I would also talk to Mexico about doing some joint projects on the border to deal with this—NAFTA was supposed to do that, but it didn't.

WM: Why would Mexico cooperate in stopping something that benefits them?

BR: I believe that Mexico is changing. I had a chat with President Calderon, and he said, "We need to worry about this, because a lot of our able-bodied people are leaving and we need them in our economy." They have generally seen immigration in terms of the remittances. But now, with a lot of immigrants leaving the central part of the country, they are seeing that it deprives Mexico of very strong, trained, able-bodied personnel. Hopefully, they will shift. But the American Congress doesn't deal with this issue, and the president doesn't lead. The president has been saying the right thing, but you have got to spend some political capital to get it through Congress.

WM: This is really a grand irony. When this president came in, the only area where he had a focused foreign policy was on anything south of the border. Now it's as if they are playing catch-up where Latin America is concerned.

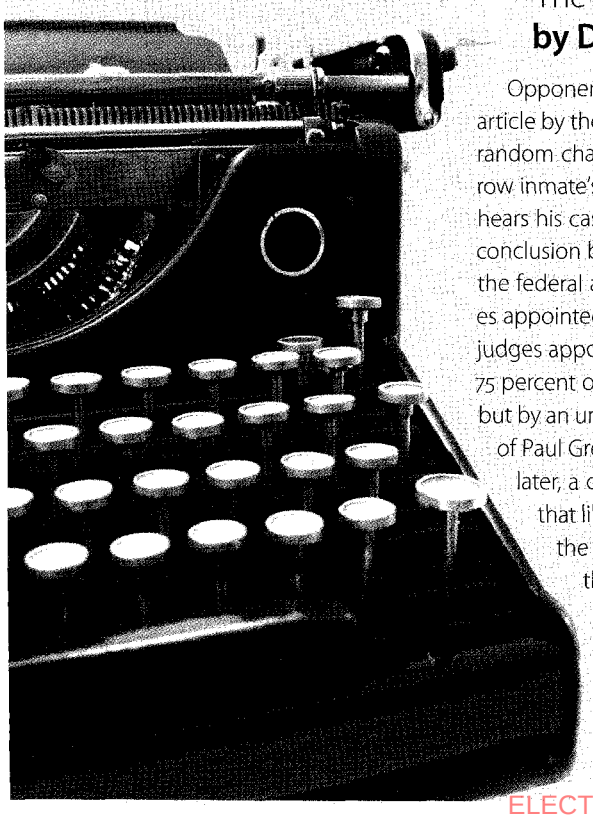
BR: Well, I would deal with the immigration issue, I would shift our aid policies, I would deal with Chavez.

WM: How would that conversation sound? You sit down, and he says, "Hi, Governor Richardson," and you say, "Hi, Hugo." Then what?

BR: Well, I know the guy. When he first became president, Clinton sent me to Venezuela. I was energy secretary, and I opened by speaking in Spanish. Chavez fancies himself a baseball pitcher, and I gave him a glove. You gotta establish a personal connection with these guys. You gotta eliminate the rhetoric and say, "What can we do here? Let's stay out of each other's face." WM

Markos Kounalakis, the president of the *Washington Monthly*, and author **Peter Laufer**, the magazine's broadcast editor, host the weekly program *Washington Monthly on the Radio*, from which this interview was excerpted. The show can be heard on our flagship station, Progressive Talk 1260 AM, in Washington, D.C. For a list of other stations or to listen online, visit www.washingtonmonthly.com.

THE *Monthly* JOURNALISM AWARD



"The Politics of Life and Death"
by Dan Horn, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 15, 2007

Opponents of the death penalty have always argued that it is unevenly applied. But an April 15 article by the *Cincinnati Enquirer*'s Dan Horn exposes just how much an inmate's fate may depend on random chance. In Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan, and Tennessee, Horn found, the outcome of a death row inmate's appeal rests almost entirely on whether the randomly selected three-judge panel that hears his case has a Republican or a Democratic majority. Horn and the *Enquirer* staff arrived at this conclusion by analyzing every death penalty appeals decision issued since 2000 by the Sixth Circuit, the federal appeals court with jurisdiction over those four states. The results were disturbing. Judges appointed by Republican presidents voted against death penalty appeals 85 percent of the time; judges appointed by Democratic presidents voted in favor of at least part of the inmates' appeals in 75 percent of the cases. In other words, an inmate's fate is determined not by the merits of the case but by an unfortunate mix of luck and judicial politics. To illustrate this point, Horn describes the case of Paul Gregory House. A court with a liberal majority approved House's appeal in 2002. Two years later, a conservative-dominated bench denied House relief. Horn concludes: "While it's a given that liberal and conservative judges often view the death penalty differently, some lawyers say the split exposed by House's case is now so dramatic it raises fundamental questions about the fairness of the system."

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Charles Peters, President of **Understanding Government**, a nonprofit dedicated to better government through better reporting, announces

THE PRIZE FOR PREVENTIVE JOURNALISM

$50,000

for the best article published in a magazine or newspaper in the next year about how government deals with a significant public problem.

freedom of the press

The article (or series) should describe the problem, how government handles it, what works and doesn't work and why, including proposals of how to do better. Its subject can be federal, state, or local agencies or a combination. Our goal is preventive journalism—articles that identify inept leaders, misguided policies, and bureaucratic bungling before they lead to disasters like the bad pre-war intelligence about WMD and the travesty that was the response to Katrina.

Nominations close on **July 15, 2008**, for articles published between **July 1, 2007**, and **June 30, 2008**, winner to be announced in September. Send nominations to **Understanding Government, P.O. Box 53338, Washington, DC 20009-9338**.

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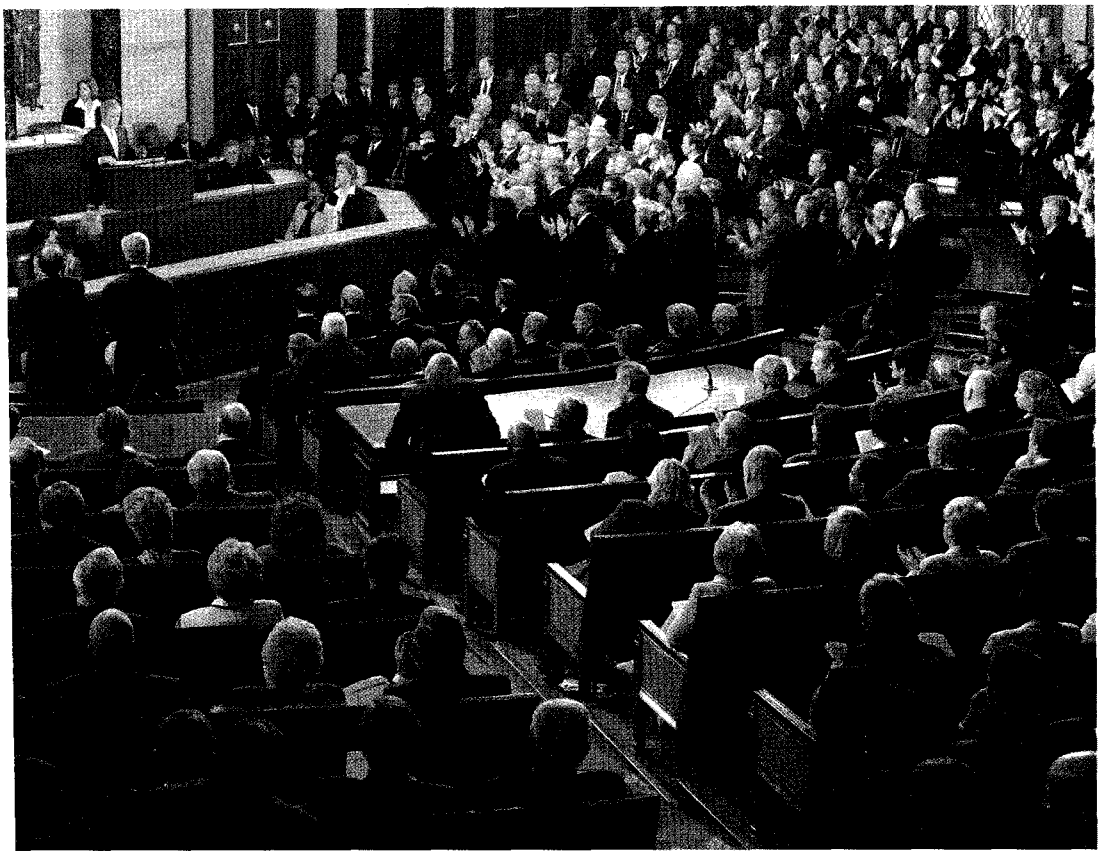

Down is up: Congressional Republicans take to their feet, while Democrats remain seated, during President Bush's January State of the Union address.

Associated Press

Thumpin' to Conclusions

Republicans are drawing all the wrong lessons from their midterm loss.

By Zachary Roth

In the days after last fall's midterm election, Republican leaders and conservative pundits quickly unified around an explanation for the party's woeful showing. The GOP, they informed us, had lost Congress because it just wasn't conservative enough. "Our voters stopped thinking of us as the party of principle because we lost our commitment to and confidence in our core principles," wrote Rep. John Boehner (R-Ohio) in a letter sent to his House Republican colleagues the day after the loss. Or, as conservative columnist George Will put it a day later in the *Washington Post*, the party "was punished not for pursuing but for forgetting conservatism."

It was comforting for Republicans to believe that the election's result, horrifying as it was, had validated rather than repudiated their core ideology. But this was, of course, a fiction. Conservative voters largely remained loyal to the party: self-identified Republicans shifted only 1 point toward the Democrats, and declined as a percentage of the electorate by only 2 points. What doomed the GOP was that it lost independent voters by 18 points—a 15-point swing from 2004. In other words, the GOP lost because it alienated moderates. Pushing more cuts to Medicaid or farm subsidies would hardly have helped.

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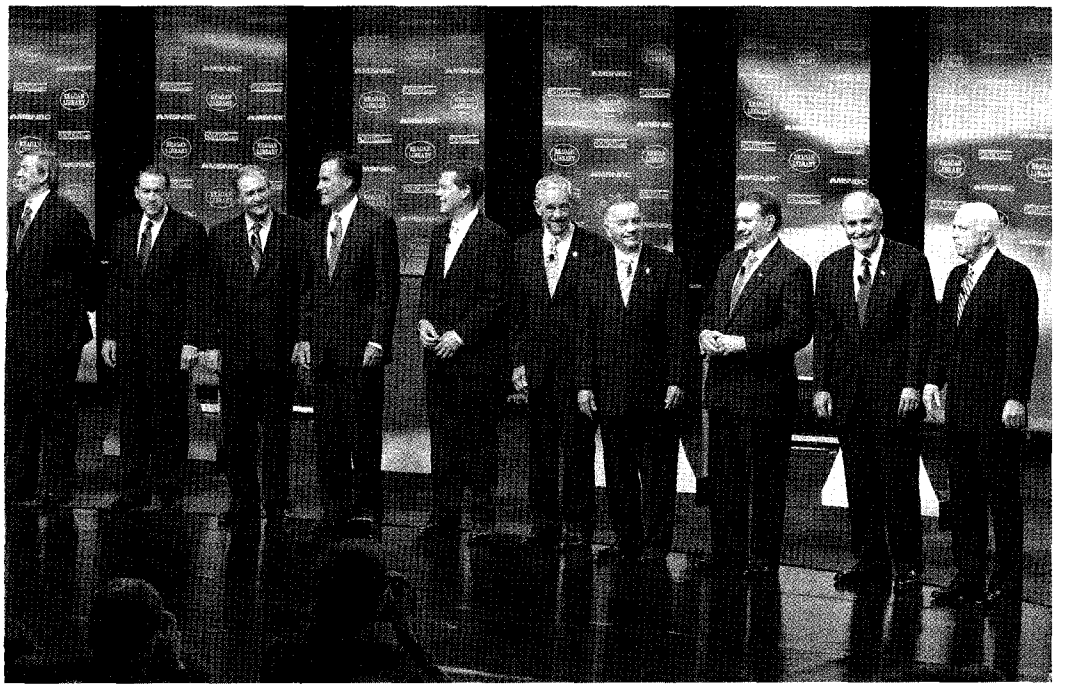
Of course, both parties long ago mastered the art of post-election spin, and the notion that voters had been yearning for true conservatism was useful in convincing many in the press that the Democrats' own agenda lacked public support. But in the months since the Republican loss, the party has given every sign that the line wasn't just for public consumption. On the two issues that voters most cared about, according to exit polls—Iraq and corruption—Republicans have made few concessions to the country's desire for change. Even more remarkably, on the underlying issue of the proper size and role of the federal government, they've reacted by choosing, consciously and deliberately, to double-down on the brand of small-government ideological purity that once energized their movement but has lately led to its decline.



Toeing the line:
Republican presidential hopefuls gather before the first GOP primary debate in May.

Associated Press

That Republicans have drawn all the wrong lessons from their loss of power isn't merely a case of tone-deaf political positioning, or even of simple stubbornness. Rather, in each of its separate responses, the party has chosen the path that best allows it to avoid the wrenching process of looking critically at some of its fundamental ideological assumptions—assumptions that remain cherished by its core supporters but that have been politically and substantively disastrous: that government should always be made smaller and that taxes should always be cut, never raised; that applying or threatening military force is the most important way we can influence the world, while diplomacy is for wimps; and that what's good for Washington business lobbyists is good for the economy.

No party relishes having to question the continuing relevance of its bedrock principles, but it's possible to emerge stronger from the process. During the 1980s and '90s, prompted by a series of electoral defeats, Democrats eventually came to acknowledge that the era of their supremacy, which had begun in the 1930s with FDR's New Deal, was over. Gradually, an increasing number of voices in the party began to challenge some of the basic precepts that Democrats had long held as close to sacrosanct but whose value for addressing the major political and policy questions of the day had declined: that government programs by definition help the poor; that crime can't be brought under control without first addressing its root causes; and that overseas military interventions are bound to end, like Vietnam, in a bloody quagmire. This journey was long and often painful, but it turned out to be crucial to Democrats' ability to win back the trust of voters and govern effectively. Without it, the party probably couldn't have balanced the budget, reformed welfare, or liberated Kosovo.

If Republicans are going to help solve any of today's most challenging problems, from fixing our health care system to fighting global warming to restoring America's ability to lead the global security system—and if they hope to win elections again—they'll have to undergo a version of this same process. And that's the problem. For decades, their party, and the broader conservative movement on which it depends, has prided itself on the appealing, bumper-sticker simplicity of its core ideology: limited government and a strong defense. (Indeed, this formula had until lately been so successful for the GOP that in recent years liberals have actively tried to develop a similarly succinct expression of their own governing philosophy—without notable success.) Little wonder, then, that most Republicans prefer to misunderstand the message voters sent last fall. If their ideological pillars crumble, Republicans will face a troubling question: What's left, beyond a cultural traditionalism that younger Americans are rejecting, for their party to stand for?

Iraq, of course, is the single most important reason why the GOP's twelve-year hold on Congress is over. But what few Republicans want to admit is that it isn't just the administration's incompetence and poor judgment, or the neocons' arrogance, that lie behind our failure there, and the other foreign policy failures—from Iran to North Korea—of the Bush era.

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Despite the tradition of Republican isolationism, conservative thinking on national security since the beginning of the cold war—long before the ascendance of neoconservatism—has been characterized by a basic, Hobbesian worldview: that the world is a dangerous place; that military force, or the threat of it, should be at the center of our national security strategy; and that efforts to negotiate with or accommodate adversaries are naive, if not morally suspect. In 1960, Barry Goldwater became the first standard-bearer of the resurgent right by penning *The Conscience of a Conservative*, a 127-page manifesto that thrilled the movement's true believers not only by denouncing big government at home but by advocating a more confrontational policy toward the Soviets. Movement conservatism's most revered figure, Ronald Reagan, continued in that vein, breaking with the cautious rapprochement of the 1970s by declaring the Soviet Union an "Evil Empire" and building up the armed forces in a largely successful attempt to ramp up, and win, an arms race.

Of course, Republican presidents haven't always given in to the yearnings of the party's extremist wing. Eisenhower held off the hardliners in his cabinet who wanted a military response to the Soviet invasion of Hungary, Nixon reestablished relations with China, and George H. W. Bush understood that trying to depose Saddam and occupy Iraq after the Gulf War would likely have caused as many problems as it solved. Even Reagan was willing to sideline administration hawks and sit down with Gorbachev when he felt the time was right. But each of these moves required a conscious effort to resist powerful voices within the party that were clamoring for confrontation.

Today, after six and a half years of encouragement from the White House—not to mention the galvanizing effect of 9/11—those voices are even stronger, both among the party's Washington elite and its rank and file. When, in a rare triumph for the administration's moderates, the State Department announced a nuclear deal with North Korea in February, it was promptly denounced by prominent conservative ideologues and opinion leaders like John Bolton and Bill Kristol as overly favorable to Pyongyang. And when John McCain recently, in response to a question from a South Carolina Republican about the need to "send an airmail message" to Tehran, began singing "Bomb Iran" to the tune of the Beach Boys' "Barbara Ann," the assembled crowd of GOP activists laughed and cheered, and his ratings among Republican primary voters briefly spiked.

This tradition of thought played a key role in uniting the Republican Party almost lockstep behind Bush's plan to invade Iraq, and helps explain why, today, even after voters sent a clear message in opposition to the president's approach, and even as the share of the country favoring withdrawal approaches 60 percent, congressional Republicans remain remarkably unified behind Bush. Nor have any of the major GOP presidential candidates—perhaps the most sensitive bellwethers for the mood of conservative voters—broken with Bush's stay-the-course strategy. Almost the only Republicans to do so are Chuck Hagel, who, for his efforts, has become persona non grata within the party, and those few senators like Norm Coleman of Minnesota and Gordon Smith of Oregon who are more worried about facing moderate voters in a general election than conservative ones in a primary.

Of course, the foreign policy failures of the Bush years should by now have made clear, and not just to liberals, the damage that this worldview can do to our national interests. This knee-jerk preference for force will need to be confronted head on, and marginalized, if Republicans are going to play any kind of constructive role in solving the national security challenges of the future—from Iran to North Korea to Islamic fundamentalism to global poverty and AIDS.

Thanks to a strange double standard, Democrats have grown used to being told that if they want to be taken seriously on national security, they'll need to sideline their antiwar wing. But Republicans almost never face calls to distance themselves from their own extremists.

And yet, thanks to a strange double standard that centrist opinion shapers are in part responsible for perpetuating, few people want to point this out. Since the dawn of the Bush era, Democrats have grown used to being told, often by their fellow liberals, that if they want to be taken seriously on national security, they'll need to sideline the extremist, knee-jerk antiwar wing of their party. And they largely have: none of the first- or second-tier Democratic presidential candidates is reflexively opposed to the use of military force, and the one minor candidate who is, Dennis Kucinich, is polling around 1 percent. But almost never do Republicans face serious calls, from their fellow conservatives or anyone else, to similarly distance themselves from their own extremists, despite the fact that those extremists are in far more powerful positions, and have wreaked far more damage in recent years, than antiwar Democrats. Questioning the wisdom of a reliance on military force to solve our problems remains an act of apostasy in the GOP. And while that's the case, Republicans will continue to stand in the way of efforts to develop a sane approach to national security.

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The sleeper issue of the midterms, though, according to exit polling, was corruption. Both parties underestimated the degree to which the string of influence-buying scandals involving Jack Abramoff, Tom DeLay, Duke Cunningham, Bob Ney, and others soured voters on the GOP. But in the postelection House leadership contest, Republicans compounded their mistake by opting for the two candidates, John Boehner and Roy Blunt, most associated with their party's K Street alliance—the very alliance that had led directly to the corruption of Abramoff and his cronies. Sure enough, under this new management little has changed. While Democrats showed they got the voters' message by quickly passing lobbying- and ethics-reform measures, the GOP resisted, thereby missing a chance to signal the arrival of a new, more honest party-wide approach. One hundred and fifty-two House Republicans, including the entire leadership team, even voted against a measure requiring members to disclose their sponsorship of earmarks.

There is a minority of Republicans—including a few up-and-coming leaders of the party's small-government wing, like Representatives Mike Pence of Indiana and Jeff Flake of Arizona—who *have* shown they understand the need to loosen their party's ties to K Street. The week after the election, writing in support of Pence's unsuccessful leadership bid, conservative columnist Bob Novak complained: "While abandoning conservative principles, the spendthrift House had become chained to special corporate interests." But the direction they're urging their party to move in suggests that, like the business-as-usual crowd that reelected Boehner and Blunt, they too have drawn the wrong lesson from defeat. Only in this case, their mistake could be even more damaging.

Rallying around a Fred Thompson or a Newt Gingrich may or may not offer Republicans a winner in 2008. But at least it'll allow them to put off, for another few precious years, the inevitable process of looking critically at some of their most basic beliefs about governing.

In the wake of their loss, many conservatives blamed their party's corruption scandals on its abandonment of small-government principles. The corruption, they claimed, was a product of "big government," which is inherently crooked, while small-government conservatism is by nature honest and virtuous. "The GOP came to power in 1994 promising lean government, and became the party that needs to unbuckle its pants and loosen its belt two notches after every lobbyist-paid meal," wrote conservative pundit Jonah Goldberg two days after the election. In other words, the sins of Abramoff et al. became just another data point in support of the small-government ideology to which Republicans have long subscribed. So, nothing serious to worry about there.

There's a problem with this logic, however. Government certainly got bigger in the last few years under Republican control, but not *that* much bigger. What it really got was more corrupt—as measured by the number of GOP congressmen and their aides who've been indicted or convicted. It wasn't so much the growth of government that invited the corruption, but the attitude toward that government. After all, if you don't believe that government is capable of doing anything of value for people, why not use it, as Bush and DeLay did, to reward cronies and perpetuate political power?

Corruption aside, many conservatives have lately argued that a renewed commitment to limiting the growth of government is the key to the party's effort to rediscover its ideological moorings. Indeed, if there has been one consistent theme that conservatives have continued to sound since their defeat—and there has been—it's the need to return to principles of fiscal restraint. As Boehner told his GOP colleagues in a January speech: "Republicans at all levels must recommit to the principles of limited and accountable government. It's that simple." And last month, Rep. Marilyn Musgrave (R-Colo.) sounded the same theme in an interview with NPR: "If we say we're for small government, and we don't act like that, then we're going to have consequences. But I'm also confident if we will be true to our principles, that the pendulum will swing back."

But this is exactly the wrong conclusion, both politically and substantively, for the party to draw. Politically, there's almost no evidence that, beyond the GOP base, small-government conservatism is an electoral winner. Bush, Rove, and DeLay implicitly understood this, which explains why they championed the creation of a half-a-trillion-dollar prescription-drug benefit. To have resisted the cries for help from seniors who depend on pricey medication would have been electoral folly. And when Republicans then tried to scale back government by privatizing Social Security, they paid a huge political price. In January 2005, 48 percent of voters disapproved of the GOP Congress, according to a Gallup poll. Six months later—after the failure of Bush's privatization plan—that figure had ballooned to 59 percent. The signs are piling up that the appeal of small-government conservatism is on the wane: In 1996, 61 percent of respondents to a Pew poll favored a smaller government with fewer services over a

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bigger government with more services. By last year, that number had declined to just 45 percent. In 2005, Coloradans voted to repeal a constitutional amendment that restricted the state legislature from increasing public spending. And a spate of recent surveys makes clear that on almost every issue that relates to the size and role of the federal government, Americans prefer the Democrats' approach. In short, by heightening still further their commitment to small-government conservatism, Republicans would likely doom themselves to years in the minority.

Most Democrats would be fine with that. But the GOP's renewed zeal for cutting government won't help the country either. A philosophy that believes only in the power of the private sector simply can't offer serious solutions to the major domestic problems—health care costs, growing inequality, economic insecurity caused by global trade, even the coarsening of the culture—that Americans will look to Washington to address over the next few years, and that will all require a strong role for the federal government. That's why if Republicans are going to participate constructively in this process, or even offer their own positive vision for tackling these issues, they'll have no choice but to take on this basic ideological assumption that views any expansion of the state as a step toward socialism.

It may be premature to expect Republicans to launch the kind of reckoning with their ideological assumptions they desperately need. Having lost only one election since enjoying full control of Washington, they're perhaps where Democrats were around 1981, when they'd just lost the White House and the Senate. It wasn't until fifteen years later that the Democratic Party's ideologues had been marginalized enough that President Clinton could break with tradition by passing welfare reform and signing a balanced budget without committing political suicide.

Still, it would be hard to overstate the lengths that today's GOP appears willing to go to in order to avoid serious thought about its future. That's what lies behind the party's increasingly desperate hunt for a "real conservative" presidential candidate. Rallying around a Fred Thompson or a Newt Gingrich may or may not offer Republicans a winner in 2008. But at least it'll allow them to put off, for another few precious years, the inevitable process of looking critically at some of their most basic beliefs about governing. Ducking this confrontation isn't in Republicans' long-term interest, or the country's. But it's not so hard to understand why they don't quite feel up for having it just yet. WM

Zachary Roth is an editor of the *Washington Monthly*.

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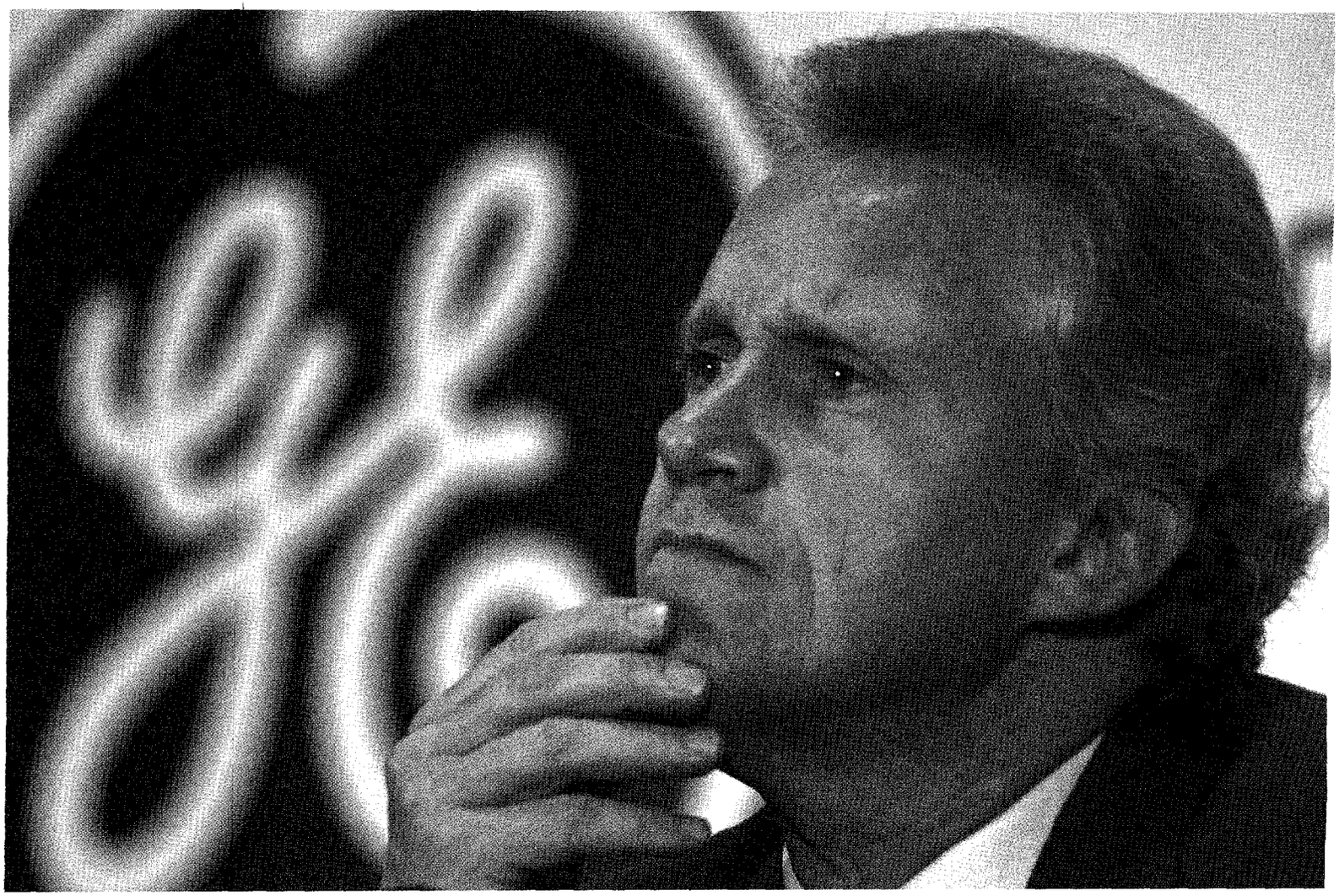

Long-term thinking: GE CEO Jeffrey Immelt has helped lead big business's shift on global warming.

Associated Press

Revolt of the CEOs

A massive expansion of the federal government, supported by big business, is on the way. Conservatives couldn't be less prepared.

By Christopher Hayes

Years from now, historians will argue over the exact moment at which the Great Conservative Crack-up finally occurred, and they'll have no shortage of candidates. Was it December 21, 2004, with the appearance of the first poll that showed a majority of Americans believed the Iraq War to be a mistake? Or September 2, 2005, when President Bush told Michael Brown he was doing a "heckuva job" while New Orleans drowned? Or a month later, when Travis County District Attorney Ronnie Earle indicted Tom DeLay?

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But I'd take January 22, 2007. On that date, a who's who of corporate America—CEOs from such industrial stalwarts as Alcoa, DuPont, Caterpillar, Pacific Gas and Electric, and General Electric—joined environmental leaders at a Washington press conference on global warming. Their surprising message for the president and Congress: Please, for the love of God, regulate us.

It's worth lingering for a moment over just how strange this was. Back in 1997, when the Clinton administration signed the Kyoto Protocol, businesses lobbied the Senate strenuously not to ratify the treaty. And yet here were industry leaders—some with miserable environmental records and decades of experience fighting off the long arm of the law—taking the lead in advocating for a comprehensive, economy-wide regulatory regime to address global warming. It's a little like a thief who's been running from the cops suddenly stopping, turning around, thrusting out his wrists, and saying, "Arrest me."

These weren't the only CEOs asking government to step in and solve a pressing social problem. Two and a half weeks later, Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott joined Andy Stern, the president of the Service Employees International Union, to announce his company's support for some form of universal health care. When it comes to business's united front against regulation, as Leo Hindery, former CEO of the YES Network and author of the book *It Takes a CEO*, puts it, "[These guys are] looking and saying, 'Look, if we don't play this global-warming thing right, heck with politics, our company's going to get hurt. If we don't reform health care, I don't care if I'm a Republican, my company will fail.'"

Not everyone's happy about this shift. A *Wall Street Journal* editorial dubbed General Electric CEO Jeff Immelt a "climate profiteer," while CNBC analyst Larry Kudlow complained, "Wal-Mart's standing shoulder to shoulder with the public service unions who basically want nationalized health care. Is Wal-Mart just kind of getting duped into this?"

But other allies of the corporate sector see these moves less as betrayals or mistakes and more as a turning of the page. "The country goes through cycles, and I think we are in a different period now," Charles Kolb, a pillar of the Beltway establishment and the president of the Committee for Economic Development, a Washington-based business advocacy group, told me. Kolb served in both the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations, and he said that he sees Reagan and Margaret Thatcher's downsizing of the regulatory state as historic achievements. But, he went on, "the issue is not whether [Franklin D.] Roosevelt was right or wrong, or whether Reagan was right or wrong. Look, the question I would ask is, Are there areas that we need to rethink?"

If the nation's business leaders seem increasingly open to an expansion of government's role in dealing with climate change and health care, they're not alone. A recent *New York Times* poll found 52 percent of Americans rating global warming as "very serious," while 63 percent agreed that "[p]rotecting the environment is so important that requirements and standards cannot be too high and continuing environmental improvements must be made regardless of cost." And according to an October 2006 *USA Today* survey, 68 percent of Americans believe providing health care coverage for everyone is more important than keeping taxes down. The sentiment extends more broadly: last year, a Pew poll showed that only 45 percent of Americans now think the government needs to get smaller, down from 61 percent a decade ago.

If these polls and other political winds are any indication, then massive change may be coming to Washington in the near future, most likely starting in January 2009. On energy and health care—two huge sectors of the American economy—the regulatory power and reach of the federal government is likely to expand in a way that hasn't occurred since the 1970s. Today's conservatives, desperately embracing the small-government ideology that once supported their movement, are almost completely unprepared for this tsunami of federal growth. Unless they can get business back on their side, or win back power, they'll be in a position neither to stop this development nor to shape it. Indeed, right now they seem blithely unaware of what's about to hit them.

Republican presidential candidates are caught in a bind: between, on the one hand, what the public increasingly wants and the business class increasingly sees as necessary, and, on the other, what the party's ideological enforcers demand.

The history of the relationship between big business and the Republican Party isn't quite as simple as one might imagine. Not much gets done in American politics without either the active support or the strategic silence of major corporations, and while big business has been a remarkably consistent and aggressive foe of certain staples of progressivism (anything having to do with unions, for instance) it has also lent crucial support to some of the most significant expansions of the regulatory or welfare state. To name just one example among many, the Social Security Act of 1965, which reformed Medicare and Medicaid, came about in large part because of the backing of Blue Cross Blue Shield, who wanted to unload the high-risk, high-cost elderly onto government.

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As recently as the late 1980s and early 1990s, top-drawer corporations could still be found supporting efforts to expand Washington's reach—particularly when those efforts were designed to solve social problems that affected their bottom line. For instance, in response to the failure of the education system to provide properly trained workers, business threw its weight behind the call from the nation's governors, and then president George H. W. Bush, for greater federal involvement in local schools—support that CEOs have kept up through subsequent administrations. And though it's been somewhat lost to history, big business, faced with spiraling health care costs, was an early driver of President Clinton's reform initiative. When the plan was unveiled in 1993, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce offered tentative backing.

That was not to last. Conservatives, led by Newt Gingrich, Bill Kristol, and the National Federation of Independent Businesses—an interest group for small and medium-sized businesses, with a unwaveringly conservative line—recognized the political threat that universal health care posed. In a now-famous strategy memo, Kristol warned that Republicans had to kill, rather than amend, the Clinton proposal. Its success, he warned, would "re-legitimize middle-class dependence for 'security' on government spending and regulation," and "revive ... the Democrats, as the generous protector of middle-class interests." Kristol and his allies succeeded in convincing big business that their long-term interests couldn't brook a Democratic resurgence. The change was decisive. The business community mobilized against the Clinton plan, spending $17 million on advertising, and helping to ensure its defeat.

Riding the momentum of that victory, the Gingrich revolution swept Republicans into power, inaugurating a new era in which there would be almost no daylight between major corporations and the GOP. Tom DeLay's K Street Project kept corporations inside the tent by threatening to stonewall their legislative agenda unless they hired lobbyists who had been preapproved by Republican gatekeepers. Business, which in the past had dispensed its largesse without much heed to party, now cast its lot with the side that controlled nearly every branch of government. During Bush's first year, Karl Rove won business support for tax cuts, even though the White House didn't insert the breaks and loopholes for corporations that many in the business community had sought. (Rove wanted a relatively "clean" bill to insulate Bush from the criticism that had bedeviled Reagan's tax cuts back in 1981, when, in the words of Reagan budget director David Stockman, "the hogs were really feeding.")

"There are 27 million companies in America," said Norquist. "I'm surprised at how few collaborators the Democrats can come up with. The Germans had better luck."

While under the DeLay/Rove machine the GOP has often acted as little more than an agent for the interests of big business, the relationship has by no means been unidirectional. The Republicans also have used corporations for their own ends. DeLay, perhaps self-servingly, boasted of the arrangement this way: "We are ideologues. We have an agenda. We have a philosophy. I want to repeal the Clean Air Act. No one came to me and said, 'Please repeal the Clean Air Act.' We say to the lobbyists, 'Help us.' We know what we want to do, and we find people to help us do that."

Of course, DeLay is now under indictment and no longer in Congress, and the machine he helped construct, a hybrid of ideological zeal and crass corruption, is quickly breaking

A river in Egypt: Is Grover Norquist, the unofficial leader of the small-government conservative movement, in denial about big business's change of heart?

Associated Press

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down. Democrats now control Congress, and the president's approval ratings rival Nixon's during Watergate. The GOP machine was always, crucially, a monopoly enterprise, relying on its stranglehold on Congress and then the White House to keep its various constituencies in line. This generally held sway even as Hurricane Katrina and Iraq made the administration's incompetence harder and harder to ignore, and business leaders started shaking their heads behind closed doors. But with its popularity and power now greatly diminished, the party is no longer able to keep those splits private. "The ability of the administration to intimidate the business community ... seems gone," said John Podesta, who heads the Center for American Progress. "They don't seem very afraid to incur the wrath of the White House."

Of course, the relentless push of real-world problems has been even more important than the weakening of conservative power in prompting this shift. After a period in the late 1990s during which HMOs helped keep a check on health care costs, those costs started to rise again in 2002, and are now hovering around 7 percent above inflation. In addition, as the world has continued to warm, the scientific consensus around global warming has hardened. Of the ten warmest years on record, four have been in the last decade.

In 2005, Peter Darbee, the CEO of PG&E Corporation, decided his company would do well to take a hard look at this reality. PG&E is no Ben & Jerry's do-gooder company. In fact, it's been an archetypal Hollywood bad guy: as the movie *Erin Brockovich* dramatized, in 1996 it was found to have contaminated the drinking water of a southern California town and was forced to pay $333 million, the largest settlement in a direct-action lawsuit in U.S. history. Still, Darbee had become convinced that climate change was a real and growing problem, and that his company, which provides power for much of the West Coast, was a major contributor. So he initiated an internal process to produce a report on climate change and its effects. The results were unequivocal: "We came to the conclusion that the earth is warming, mankind is responsible, and the time to act is now," he told me. The internal review also concluded that the best way to address the problem was some kind of mandatory control and regulation of carbon emissions.

Last year Darbee emerged as an outspoken proponent of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's ambitious greenhouse-reduction strategy, and helped to organize the business-environmental coalition that put together the January press conference. When I asked him what initially prompted his decision to focus PG&E's attention on climate change, he cited a basic principle of management: the longer you wait to

Want your day in court? Not if the GOP has their way.

"Demonstrates that much of the caterwauling about trial lawyers is in fact part of an orchestrated campaign by industry and its allies in Washington D.C. to neutralize a vexing opponent...and [shows] which interests stand to benefit the most from their demise." —*American Lawyer*

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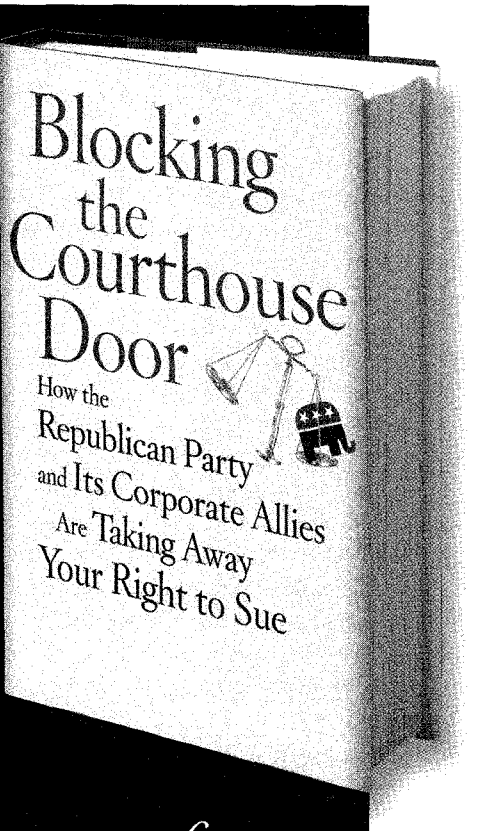

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address a crisis, the less room you have to maneuver. "We could sit on this and drag our heels and then the consequences could be drastic. The more time you have to deal with it, the more degrees of freedom you have."

Even for those CEOs preoccupied with the next quarter's earnings, the long term has a funny way of sneaking up. Imagine for a moment you're planning a new factory to produce washing machines. Ideally, the facility is going to operate for a number of years into the future, but its operating costs are going to be quite different if the federal government imposes a carbon tax at some point in the near future. How much capital do you invest up front to reduce the facility's emissions? Or imagine you're a major car company debating whether to site a new car plant in Canada or Alabama. After weighing the pros and cons, you decide on Canada. Why? Because in the United States, health care costs are growing at 7 percent above inflation, and you're likely to be on the hook for your employees' health care costs into the foreseeable future. This, in fact, is exactly what happened in 2005, when Toyota sent shockwaves through corporate boardrooms by opting to open a new plant in Woodstock, Ontario, citing Canada's socialized medicine as a factor.

On energy and health care—two huge sectors of the American economy—the regulatory reach of the federal government is likely to expand in a way that hasn't occurred since the 1970s. Today's conservatives, desperately embracing the small-government ideology that once supported their movement, are almost completely unprepared for this tsunami of federal growth.

If the Toyota decision was a wake-up call on health care, Hurricane Katrina played a similar role on climate change. "I think it moved the frame of reference," said Mindy Lubber, who leads a group of institutional investors working to pressure businesses to reduce emissions. Even for those CEOs who'd believed that climate change was a problem, Lubber said, most had conceived of it as a long-term issue. "And as a CEO, I'm programmed to think about quarterly earnings. But what we saw with Katrina was that quarterly earnings are impacted," since the destruction of the Gulf refineries caused a spike in energy prices, among other negative effects.

Health care and climate change are, of course, distinct issues, each with their own associated policy debates—single-payer or individual mandates, carbon taxes or cap and trade—but what unites them is the unpredictability of the future costs they'll impose on business. "The one thing that business managers and CEOs hate is uncertainty," said Bruce Josten, a top lobbyist at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "They love certainty. Here you have two issues of huge uncertainty and huge unpredictability."

But certainty requires clear rules, and those have been lacking at the national level. In the absence of federal leadership, state governments have rushed in to fill the vacuum, passing rafts of legislation meant to encourage alternative energy use, curb carbon emissions, and provide health insurance for their citizens. The initiatives on both these fronts—from Massachussets Governor Mitt Romney's universal health care reform to New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg's recently unveiled congestion pricing—have triggered fears among corporations that they'll have to deal with a state-by-state patchwork of fifty different regulatory regimes, giving them a powerful incentive to support a comprehensive nationwide approach.

Whatever public-mindedness there was to Darbee's decision to take a lead on carbon regulation, his calculation of the likelihood of future regulation had more than a little to do with his conversion. "It's not clear whether we will get legislation in this administration," he said. "But I think in the next three years, the probability approaches 100 percent." The more convinced corporations become that regulation is going to happen, the more invested they become in shaping that regulation. In this way, the anticipation of future regulation creates something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. "The underlying statement I've heard is that if this [health care] system collapses then the business community will end up with something they don't like," Andy Stern told me. "There's sort of a sense [that] we should lead this, or if we don't, whatever happens we should accept the consequences."

"The corporate guys are beginning to think this is going to happen," said Bill Galston, a senior policy adviser in the Clinton White House and a current fellow at the Brookings Institution, referring to health care and climate change legislation. "They are willing to make their peace with the welfare and regulatory state as long as they can have some say. What they don't want is for the train to leave the station

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and they're not in the first-class car." The Chamber of Commerce's Josten summed up his members' views this way: "You want a seat at the table, because if you're not at the table you may be on the menu."

Though in the imagination of the left, big business and conservatives are natural allies, from the point of view of many on the right that's hardly the case. "I see most of the corporate types as the enemy," conservative direct-mail guru Richard Viguerie told me, speaking of big business's newfound support for action on global warming and health care. "I don't see them as our allies, never have. They're country-club Republicans. They really don't like us, quite frankly, and it's probably mutual. Can you imagine Jeff Immelt standing up and defending any social issue he feels strongly about, or talking about the vulgar culture we have? They're very unprincipled with these things. They're recovering big-government types. You give them a temptation, and they jump at it."

In that sense, the partnership that congressional leaders forged with big business in 1993 has always been unstable. And the recent defections of some CEOs have sparked vituperation from movement loyalists. "I've been hearing that the Fortune 500 types would love to drop their legacy costs off at the federal taxpayer," conservative power broker Grover Norquist lamented to me. "The Safeway guy"—CEO Steve Burd, who recently endorsed Democratic Senator Ron Wyden's universal health care legislation—"has signed off on pensions because he's a lousy businessman. He screwed up, and he wants the rest of us to pay for his lousy incompetence. Wrong answer!"

Norquist and his allies understand that their only hope is to remake that 1993 deal. But short of the GOP retaking Congress and holding on to the White House—or the earth suddenly cooling—that's not going to happen. And at some level, conservatives know it, responding to questions about the rift with blustery denial: "There are 27 million companies in America," said Norquist. "I'm surprised at how few collaborators the Democrats can come up with. The Germans had better luck."

Republicans, weighed down by the knee-jerk small-government philosophy that their base demands, simply lack the ideological flexibility to even talk about issues, like global warming and health care, that will require an expansion of government—much less propose ideas to help shape them. Just look at the presidential field: John McCain has retained the lone plank of his maverick platform by sponsoring legislation in the Senate to cap and trade carbon emissions, but he's not spending much time touting that effort in front of Republican primary voters. Rudy Giuliani, who as mayor of New York was moderately fiscally conservative but certainly no supply-sider, is now waxing poetic about the benefits of the flat tax, the beauty of the Laffer curve, and the creeping "socialism" of the Democratic Party's universal health care proposals. And Mitt Romney finds that his signature accomplishment as governor of Massachusetts—a universal health care law that relies heavily on "individual mandates"—makes him suspect in conservative eyes. "He's spinning his wheels at 100 miles an hour to explain how it wasn't a big-government solution but a market solution," former GOP Congressman Dick Armey told me.

So Republican presidential candidates are caught in a bind: between, on the one hand, what the public increasingly wants and the business class increasingly sees as necessary, and, on the other, what the party's ideological enforcers demand. Some conservatives aren't too blinkered to see where this is likely to lead. From his perch on the *New York Times* op-ed page, David Brooks has been urging fellow conservatives to stop looking to the idealized small-government icons of Goldwater and Reagan as a guide to the problems of the twenty-first century. "Democratic approaches are favored on almost all domestic, tax, and fiscal issues, and even on foreign affairs," Brooks wrote in an April column entitled "Grim Old Party." "The public, in short, wants change. And yet the Republicans refuse to offer that."

At the end of the day, the country can't tax-cut its way to better health care or a post-oil economy or fewer carbon dioxide emissions. The titans of capitalism are beginning to realize that, even if the conservative movement's leading lights can't—or won't. WM

Christopher Hayes is a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at the Nation Institute.

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Liberty Under Attack

Reclaiming Our Freedoms in an Age of Terror

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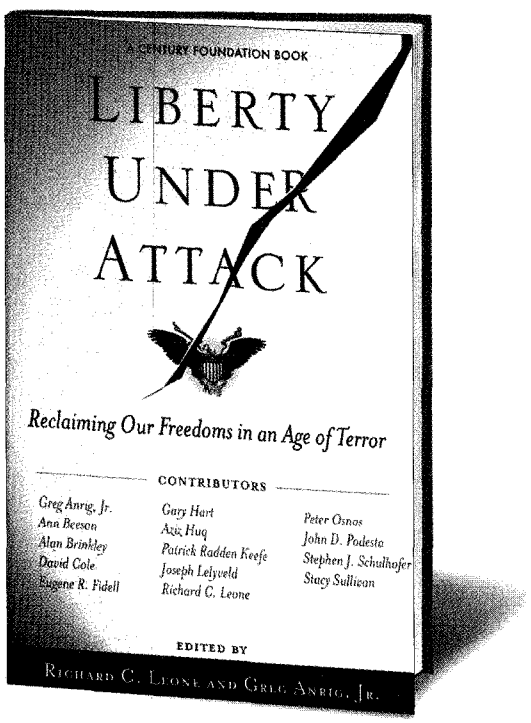

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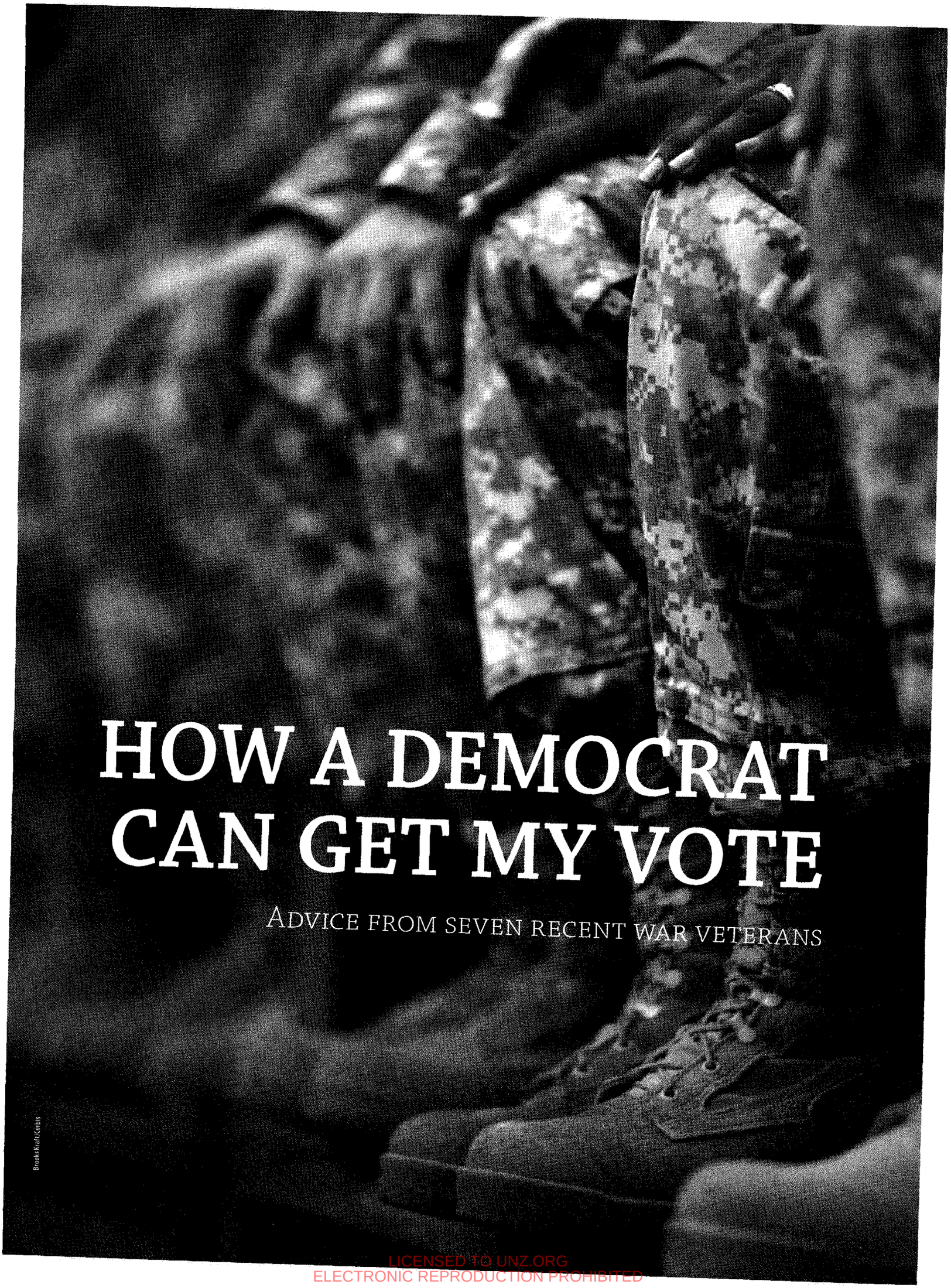

HOW A DEMOCRAT CAN GET MY VOTE

Advice from seven recent war veterans

Brooks Kraft/Corbis

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One Soldier's Story: An Introduction

By Phillip Carter

I have a confession: I used to be a Republican. And not just a registered Republican, but a fairly active one. I volunteered for the Bush-Quayle advance team in Los Angeles in 1992; I attended the Republican National Convention in Houston as a youth delegate in 1992; and I canvassed neighborhoods for Richard Riordan, the centrist Republican megamillionaire who ran for mayor of Los Angeles in 1993 and led the city from 1993 to 2001.

Things began to change for me in 1995 when I joined the Army ROTC program at UCLA. I entered the Army just as the deployment to Bosnia was taking shape. That mission held a great deal of appeal for me, both as someone committed to idealism in American foreign policy and as the grandson of Holocaust survivors who felt that stopping genocide was a noble raison d'etre for this country. I adopted a worldview that hewed closely to the internationalism espoused by then President Clinton and the first President Bush. When the time came to pick a military branch, I chose to be a military police lieutenant, so that I could be on the front lines of America's future peacekeeping and nation-building endeavors.

After graduating from UCLA, I went to Korea, where I led a military police platoon of twenty-one American and eight Korean soldiers near the heavily militarized border with North Korea. My next assignment was to Fort Hood, Texas, where I led another platoon and trained for war in the California desert. Somewhere along the way, I became a liberal, at least by Army standards.

On foreign policy issues, I was already on board with the Clinton administration. When the war in Kosovo broke out, I felt we were on the side of right, and I supported the subsequent deployment of troops to keep the peace there. Although I recognized that there were limits to what military units could accomplish in the Balkans, I had a deeper faith that we could still make a difference there, and I remained committed to that ideal. Democratic foreign policy, with its fusion of realism and liberalism, appealed to this idealism of mine, especially the idea that we could intervene to stop wars instead of fighting them.

Rather, it was on the domestic policy side where I experienced my greatest transformation. I grew up in the upper-middle-class suburbs of west Los Angeles, and my conservatism was borne of privilege and distance from America's working class. I cared little for issues like health care and welfare because I had never personally experienced financial hardship, nor known many friends who had.

The Army changed that. Suddenly, I joined a world more diverse than anything I had known. My platoons comprised a mix of racial, religious, and socioeconomic groups unlike any cohort I had worked with before. I'd like to think that I did a decent job as their lieutenant, but the truth is that I probably learned more from my soldiers (especially my sergeants) than they ever learned from me. In addition to getting many practical lessons about soldiering, I got lessons about life in America. My men and women taught me about growing up in rural American towns, where advanced high school classes were taught three towns away. I learned that health care benefits often shaped military families' decisions to reenlist, because no private-sector employer was half as generous as Uncle Sam when it came to caring for spouses and children. My African American and Latino soldiers taught me to look at the military as an opportunity and a path to advancement and to forever see affirmative action and diversity initiatives through the lens of our military experience.

My second tour on active duty was in Iraq from 2005 to 2006, and it confirmed my conversion. There I worked with the Iraqi police in the Diyala Province, living on a small compound in downtown Baqubah with my adviser team, our interpreters, and our Iraqi counterparts. We faced some difficulty, however, because of the dissonance between our mission to promote the rule of law and U.S. policies elsewhere which undermined that principle. This made it harder for us to earn the respect and support of the Iraqi people. I saw firsthand the importance of being the good guys—and being seen as such—and came to believe more deeply in a foreign policy grounded in both our interests and our ideals, as well as a deep pragmatism about the limits of military force.

I still care deeply about the social issues that I learned

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to care about during my first tour on active duty. In 2008, I will pay close attention to health care, immigration, and taxation, because I think they have a profound effect on my life and our country. What concerns me most, however, is that for the past seven years our nation has drifted rudderless through the war on terrorism. The "preventive war" doctrine proved such a bust in Iraq that today we have no strategy. In the absence of guidance from the White House, decisions about military strategy and resources are being made in a vacuum. In 2008, then, I will be looking for the candidate who articulates a viable national security strategy, and shows me the ability to implement it in a responsive and flexible way that restores America's place in the world and keeps us safe. I think, given what I've seen of the presidential field so far, that candidate will be a Democrat.

That's my story, but I speak as only one military veteran. Each of the 1.4 million veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq has taken his or her own political path. Some, for example, have moved from left to right rather than right to left. Others have stayed in place. What nearly all have in common, though, is a conviction that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are the most important issues facing the nation.

We're entering a time of significant political shifts. That's reflected in the military, too. Three years ago, 60 percent of military voters polled by the *Military Times* identified themselves as Republican. Today, that number is down to 46 percent, or less than half. While Democrats, once at 13 percent, have inched up to 16 percent, most Republican defectors appear to have become independents of some sort. Even the officer corps, which in 2003 favored Republicans over Democrats by a ratio of more than seven to one (the *Military Times* has not gathered more recent statistics), is reported to be weakening in its support for the Republican Party. After all, what they most feared would happen under a Democratic administration—that the military was being overstretched and weakened—has instead happened under a Republican one. Although many military personnel still poll conservatively on *issues*, they now show a deep disenchantment with the Republican Party, and this administration in particular.

The sentiments of the military are viewed by the public as an important barometer of a president's fitness to lead. Under Clinton, hostile relations with the military limited the White House's policy options on issues ranging from gays in the military to intervention in the Balkans. Under Bush, support from the military has led to the opposite extreme, enabling the president to use force recklessly with the imprimatur of military approval. Neither model of civil-military relations is good for the country.

The question, now, is to what extent disenchantment with the White House will affect the military vote. It's possible that the GOP, for all its shortcomings, is still seen as the lesser of two evils. Then again, maybe not. So, what could get a veteran to vote for a Democrat in 2008?

This is the question the *Washington Monthly* posed to a group of military veterans of various ranks and political persuasions. Some of the essays that follow come to conclusions that conflict with the conclusions of other essays. That's the nature, of course, of a forum. The point was to shed some light on something that's a mystery to many readers: how members of the military think about politics. Complementing this collection is a reported piece by Spencer Ackerman, who argues that Democrats are right on the merits of withdrawal from Iraq but misguided on what message that will send to our troops there. While many troops want to see the war ended, Ackerman writes, many soldiers will see reason for hope in Iraq and still want to persevere. Any withdrawal proposal must account for both parts of this war-weary perspective. With any luck this issue of the *Washington Monthly* should help make that point of view clearer.

Phillip Carter, an attorney with McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP in Los Angeles, is an Iraq veteran who contributes on national security to the *Washington Monthly.*

Withdraw Decisively

By Ross Cohen

In 2003, I spent the summer engaged in a three-month training deployment to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Knox is best known as the repository of America's gold reserves, but it also houses a state-of-the-art complex for training the Army in urban warfare. Replete with an artificial sewer system, a piped-in muezzin calling the imaginary faithful to prayer, and paintballers firing live rounds (of paint), the Knox site seeks to replicate the intensity and claustrophobia of a nasty urban skirmish.

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As my unit advanced upon our objective, we lumbered up to a building on the town's outskirts that needed securing. Running in a file from our cover behind a train car to the building, we had strict orders to keep moving—no matter what.

Advancing, I felt a hard splat against my leg, and I froze. I had never actually been fired at before, and the shock stopped me. I couldn't make a decision, and the advance came to a temporary and frantic halt. With paintballs pouring down on us, we had become stuck in a soldier's worst nightmare: the kill zone.

I was reprimanded for my inaction, of course, but it was good that I learned my lesson while in training and not later, when I was a paratrooper in Afghanistan. Indeed, this lesson—whatever you do, don't just stand there; do *something*—is central to the military mentality. It also explains why so many servicemen and -women voted for George Bush in 2004 and why I, a lifelong Democrat, briefly considered doing the same. The president, for all his flaws, appeared to understand the dangers of the kill zone intuitively. John Kerry, on the other hand, seemed like a man afraid to lead. Fairly or not, the flip-flop charge, especially in relation to his changing positions on Iraq, worried people, and no one more than military voters. He seemed like a man trapped in the kill zone.

Kerry, of course, wasn't the first Democrat to suffer from such perceptions. Among those in the services, Democrats are thought of as unable to confidently make command decisions. They are too eggheaded, too political, too weak. And yet, today, Bush's failures afford the Democrats a unique opportunity to dispel such caricatures and make inroads among those in uniform. As a recent *Military Times* poll shows, increasing numbers of troops are now disenchanted with the president and with the war. While the military in 2008 will not necessarily be looking across the aisle to replace Bush, it will be open to any candidate who can enunciate a clear idea—whatever that idea may be—of where he or she will be taking the country, especially in relation to Iraq. A Democrat can tap into this vote simply by displaying clear leadership on issues of war and peace.

A candidate who proposes a speedy withdrawal need not fear an overwhelmingly negative reaction from the troops. That would be the result only for a candidate whose position seemed camouflaged in fuzzy language and hedged bets. The "Fighting Dems"—Democratic veterans such as Jim Webb, who ran for largely Republican-leaning congressional seats this year—represented a good start at speaking clearly.

Certainly, leadership is not the only concern the military has about Democrats. The red-blue cultural divide exists in extremis between the military and Democratic voters. Kerry, with his windsurfing and his Swiss-boarding-school education, was only the latest in a string of candidates perceived as culturally alien elitists, unable to connect at the gut. Guns, too, play a role in losing votes. Until a Democratic nominee can convince the NRA that he or she is no threat to the Second Amendment, the party will have a hard time winning over new military voters. It is easy to imagine the GOP attempting to shift the debate back to these issues in the upcoming election.

But Iraq remains the critical issue facing the country, and more and more troops have come to believe that victory is impossible. They also know that the war is hollowing the Army out. Not only does this harm our national security—witness our lack of options vis-à-vis the Iranians and the North Koreans—but it also strains service members' morale. Since Republican policies can be directly linked to the weakening of the Army, Democrats can credibly claim that the GOP is endangering our national security.

In November 2004, most of my colleagues, officers and enlisted alike, voted to reelect George Bush in spite of the fact that he had sent them to fight a poorly planned war being waged for ever-shifting rationales. They overlooked these flaws because his firmness inspired their confidence. If Democrats come out with equal firmness for withdrawal, they may find themselves picking up some unexpected new military votes. The men and women of the military fear, above all else, someone who will abandon them to the kill zone. They want someone who will lead them through it.

Ross Cohen is a former paratrooper and a veteran of the war in Afghanistan. He is currently completing his master's degree in public affairs at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, and he interned last summer for the reelection campaign of Governor Bill Richardson. He has two short stories published in *Operation Homecoming: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front, in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families*.

Stay and Fight

By Garth Stewart

I am a moderate Republican. The short answer to the question of what it would take for me to vote for a Democrat is simply this: George W. Bush. (That's what made me vote for John Kerry in 2004.) In 2008, though, the largest policy issue casting a shadow over my vote will be that of Iraq. I am a youth who has served in Iraq in the U.S. Army, and my experience dramatically changed my views. I was against the invasion initially, because I felt alarmed at the hostility from the international community and ashamed at the idea that we were forcing a war on a smaller, weaker country. (Even so, I wasn't about to let my country go to war without me, and if I had reservations about the conflict, then it was all the better I be there to help make it more humane.) Later, my time in Iraq changed my opinion into one of wholehearted support for the war. That's because I admitted to myself that I believe in three very important ideas:

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The first is simply dumb patriotism. Perhaps readers will not believe that such naive notions toward country still exist, but my peers in the military are a living testament to them. It shouldn't seem unreasonable to anyone that men and women who have been willing to fight this war might also be willing to vote to ensure the conflict is negotiated to the advantage of our nation. If we are at war, then I want to win. As a person who has already invested a lot of time, sweat, and blood into this venture, I naturally want to see it become a success.

Second, I believe that the Iranian revolution in 1979 ended a century-long secularizing trend in the Middle East. The newer shift toward theocracy alarms me. I saw the invasion of Iraq as having great potential to change the entire region for the better. I understand the criticisms and accusations about colonialism and the honest and sober fears Americans have about being viewed as imperialists. However, the people we are fighting must be taught what civil rights are, regardless of how old their civilization may be. If we don't do it, no one else will. Satisfying our strategic interests as a nation requires that we fix something that would otherwise continue to be a threat.

Lastly, I have a problem with al-Qaeda. We might have been diverted from fighting al-Qaeda in Afghanistan with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, but that doesn't mean we aren't also fighting al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia. I cannot give my vote to anyone who would advocate withdrawal in the face of our sworn enemies. Unfortunately, that's what leading Democrats are doing, and why they're unlikely to get my support. Whoever comes forward and owns the "withdrawal vote" in 2008 can be sure to lose mine. The Democrat who can gain my vote will be the one who comes forward with a plan to win.

Garth Stewart is a sophomore at Columbia University. He served in Iraq as a mortar gunner in the 3rd Infantry Division during the invasion in 2003.

Understand the War We're In

By Andrew Exum

When George W. Bush was first elected president, in 2000, I was a newly commissioned second lieutenant in the U.S. Army going through infantry training at Fort Benning. While still in college, I had vocally supported John McCain in the primaries, but I voted for my fellow Tennessean Al Gore in the general election. The morning after election day, when we still didn't know who the next president would be, a group of us were gathered for the morning's formation, and one of the guys from Texas was kidding me about my vote.

At that moment a captain walked by—one of the instructors—and, having overheard our conversation, took it upon himself to upbraid me for my vote. While my peers stood around looking embarrassed, the captain proceeded to explain how eight years of Clinton/Gore had "broken" the U.S. Army and that my vote against George W. Bush was naive and reckless.

I wonder, looking back, where that officer is now and what he thinks of *his* vote. (I also wonder whether or not he has reflected on the illegality of admonishing a junior officer in front of his peers for his politics, but that's another matter.) What is clear, more than six years after the first election of George W. Bush, is that the Army was not in fact broken in the 1990s but certainly is now. The mismanagement of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has taken a heavy toll on the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, and they will need years to recover.

The destruction of the Army and Marine Corps stemmed from a failure of the Bush administration—its greatest failure:

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the inability to articulate or even understand what kind of war we're fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. As any student of Clausewitz can tell you, if you fail to understand the nature of the war you're fighting, you're doomed before the first shot is fired.

Writing in the journal *Survival*, Australian David Kilcullen, now a senior adviser to David Petraeus in Iraq, eloquently described the kind of "global insurgency" against which not only the United States but the established world order finds itself struggling to defeat—from the *bled* of Algeria to the streets of London. Any candidate serious about defense should carefully read Kilcullen's article. (And there's another lesson here: while men like Kilcullen and Petraeus and James Mattis of the Marine Corps came to prominence during the Bush years, their talents owe no allegiance to a party. A Democrat in office would do well to retain their services and those of men like them.) Understanding the nature of the fight is an indispensable first step to making long-overdue policy changes.

When Republicans think of role models to follow for getting tough on defense, they inevitably think of Ronald Reagan. Democrats think of John F. Kennedy. Here the Democrats are better placed than their Republican peers. Reagan "won" the cold war by outspending his competitor—on weapons systems, advanced aircraft, tanks, and so on. Today, there is no Soviet Union to spend into submission, and stealth bombers and nuclear submarines are hardly the weapons of choice in a counterinsurgency fight.

Kennedy, by contrast, invested in weapons that *are* effective against insurgencies and guerrillas, supporting the Army Special Forces and fathering the Navy's SEAL teams. These kinds of weapons—not bombers or warships—are best suited to fight a global insurgency. This provides an opportunity to a Democratic candidate. For once, they can argue, it's the Republicans who are at sea on issues of defense policy and who don't understand modern war. *We get it*, they can say. *They don't*.

Hillary Clinton, still the front-runner in the Democratic field, has worked admirably hard over the past six years to burnish her defense credentials. She doesn't look nearly as uncomfortable around generals as her husband did as president and is a careful student of defense policy. One gets the feeling that many generals would be happy enough to trade this disastrous presidency for a second Clinton administration.

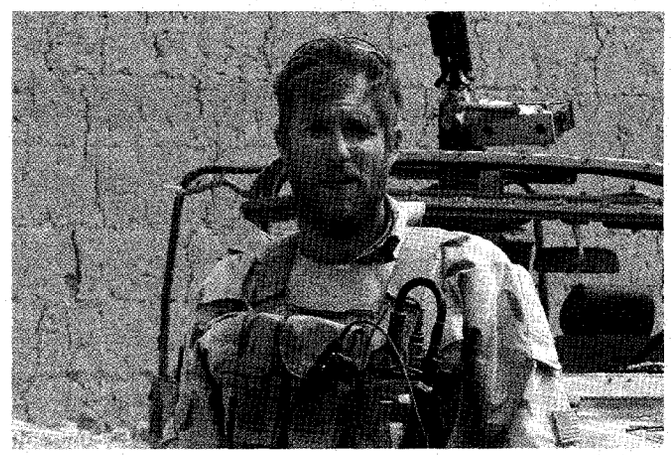
Ironically, though, a young and innovative candidate like Barack Obama may be as well positioned as anyone else to articulate this new kind of conflict. The true counterinsurgency experts in the Army today, after all, are not the generals—they are the young captains and lieutenants who have learned counterinsurgency the hard way, on the streets of Ramadi in Iraq and in the mountains of Paktia Province in Afghanistan. The older, unimaginative general officer corps, too wed to the old ways, has hardly covered itself in glory these past five years.

Regardless of who the nominee is, I'll carefully read and listen to the statements that come from the Democratic candidates. Because if they really get it, if they properly articulate the nature of the war that began on September 11, then a Democrat will earn my vote in 2008.

Andrew Exum is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and the American University of Beirut. He led a platoon of light infantry in Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks and subsequently led a platoon of Army Rangers as part of special operations task forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Elect More Jim Webbs

By Clint Douglas



I imagine if you asked any good noncommissioned officer why he votes Republican, he would simply answer, "Because Democrats are a bunch of pussies." (Sorry, but that's how soldiers talk.) I happen to be a Democrat, even something of a Yellow Dog Democrat, but the perception of Democratic weakness on matters of defense is pervasive both inside the military and out. American liberalism fares even worse. Someone once defined a liberal as the person who leaves the room when a fight breaks out. And there's the rub. Republicans *will* fight, and the military holds that in high esteem. Fighting is considered both an art and a science, worthy of study. The military gives out medals for doing it well. Cowardice can still be rewarded with a firing squad.

The Republican Party has done well in portraying itself as the party of national defense. While that resonates with a large swath of the electorate, for people in the armed forces it's more than just words. Traditionally, troops have believed

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that good things happen when a Republican is in office: they get pay raises, funds get allocated for training, and at least a portion of the money makes it through the Pentagon's corrupt procurement system for some useful equipment. In short, military life improves. This received wisdom has been wrapped in the flag and handed down by old soldiers to the new. But it goes beyond finances. Conservatives appear genuinely to respect people in the service. They don't just assume that soldiers are economic victims or refugees from an unfair free market. They might even allow that one could enjoy soldiering without being a nut, a sadist, or a fascist.

Most of my non-Army friends would identify themselves as liberals or progressives or Democrats. My experience may be atypical, because I tend to hang around with opinionated people, but nearly all of them, I find, are suspicious of the military. "They'll change you," most warned after I announced my intention to enlist. "Don't do it." One acquaintance suggested psychotherapy instead. (This was my personal favorite in patronizing offensiveness.) When, later, I failed to turn into a mindless drone, they decided I would benefit from lectures about the Contras, the School of the Americas, or Augusto Pinochet. They've since moved on to Gitmo and the war in Iraq. I usually resign myself to the moralizing, turn to the bartender, and start ordering doubles.

Let's face it: while only a tiny percentage of our total population has any direct relationship with the military, those numbers are even more anemic among the left-of-center types that gravitate toward the Democratic Party. My peers in this group have no qualms about holding forth about the armed forces, an institution with which they have no experience. Worse, when the windiness has subsided, they have no concrete suggestions on defense policy. They'll do butter, but they won't do guns. That would be someone else's job. I suppose this is still a lingering consequence of the hangover from the Vietnam War, when cold war liberals brought us to the jungles of Southeast Asia and found themselves discredited. After that, Democrats abdicated national security to the Republican Party. What was Bill Clinton's very first foray into defense policy? "Don't ask. Don't tell." Well done, that. You wonder why the military votes overwhelmingly for the GOP? I'd suggest that for years they had little choice: the Democratic Party gave up and left the room, and didn't even pretend to want the votes. Although Clinton later won a war in Kosovo and John Kerry got endorsements from admirals and generals, neither man could undo hardened perceptions of the party.

Nevertheless, with even a Pyrrhic victory in Iraq looking ever more remote and Afghanistan (where I served) still a mess, the myth of Republican strategic mastery may finally have been shattered. When the legions return home and the extent of the mendacity that led to this Iraqi adventure sinks in, we might witness a sea change in American politics. If those who fought and bled and died come to feel it was for nothing, they're going to be very, very pissed off. I doubt they'll quietly move to the margins of society. They're the best-educated military that the country has ever had, and they'll demand to be heard. My guess is that many will be willing to shift their party allegiance.

Such political realignment won't come easily or quickly. It won't come from having armies of paid consultants coaching their candidates on how to project strength, which will only come off as canned. Instead, Democrats would be better off simply showing that they've come to terms with an obvious truth: defense isn't just one among many responsibilities of government; it's the *primary function* of government. Progress and prosperity can come only after a state of physical security is attained. Just ask the citizens of Iraq or any other Hobbesian dystopia. Democrats know this, but they must *show* they know this.

I imagine that if you asked any good noncommissioned officer why he votes Republican, he would simply answer, "Because Democrats are a bunch of pussies."

Part of that will involve simply leveling with people. The electorate is fractured, war weary, and cynical. After the lies of the Bush administration, some honesty will be more than a little refreshing. Americans are owed at least that. Here's a start: while we don't face exactly the "long war" that the administration envisions, we will be at war for the foreseeable future. The monsters unleashed by the war in Iraq will plague us long after I and the readers of this column are dead. Two million Iraqis are refugees, creating the largest displacement of people since the creation of the state of Israel. Unifying the generations of Iraqis who grow up in squalid refugee camps will be an implacable hatred of the United States. Whether we depart from Iraq in two days or in two years will not change this fact. All we can do is try to manage it.

Democratic leaders who demonstrate a proper understanding of national defense and who can tell it straight should be able to win votes from members of the military. If they could call on sacrifices from the civilian population, their prospects might be even better. Military personnel and their families can no longer carry the burden alone.

Liberals, to their credit, are starting to get this. Among Democrats who embody the new ethos, Jim Webb, with his square-jawed rebuttal to the president's latest State of the

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Union address, has been one of the most promising exemplars. What makes the phenomenon of Webb all the more promising is that the liberal blogosphere effectively recruited him. Indeed, by putting war veterans such as Jim Webb or Patrick Murphy in Congress, Democrats have finally presented military professionals with leaders they can respect, regardless of their views on Iraq. In the end, style matters. Clinton may have won a couple of wars, but he was seen as soft. Webb may be against a war, but he's seen as tough.

When it comes to the presidential race, though, I'll be campaigning for Barack Obama. The party needs new leadership and a fresh set of hands to take on the myriad problems that beset the republic. What's more, a surprising number of my conservative colleagues have voiced support for him. Although Obama often speaks in generalities and has not served in the military himself, he seems to understand the issues that matter, including, most crucially, Iraq. As for Democrats who voted in favor of that misbegotten Iraqi war, they must be held to task. We can ill afford excuses from those who bear responsibility for so much lost blood, treasure, and prestige, and our next president should be someone who got it right from the start.

Clint Douglas, former staff sergeant, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne), served in Afghanistan in 2003, after numerous deployments to Latin America. He is the author of "Lunch with Pirates" in *Operation Homecoming: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front, in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families.*

Bash the Generals

By Melissa Tryon

In 2003, I found myself in a Kuwaiti desert, preparing for battle, foiled by a weather slide that wouldn't print. I'd led my detachment of tactical intelligence analysts only three months but had really been preparing for combat leadership since taking my Oath of Office almost seven years earlier. I'd pushed myself to run faster than the Army standards for males, to identify traditionally "enemy" vehicles on sight, and to immerse myself in Middle Eastern history, culture, and basic languages. Now sand was invading every crevice of body and machine, and all my expensive training was useless for want of a properly formatted printout. My husband (academy classmate and Ranger-qualified infantry officer) was only yards away, preparing his antitank platoon for the same fight, and I knew that watching his gun truck cross the line of departure a few hours before mine would be frightening, as would

the constant threat of ambush or incoming fire; but it never occurred to me that the single greatest stressor when preparing for a light infantry brigade's ground invasion would be "Death by Dell." It wasn't that the slide was essential to the success of Operation Iraqi Freedom, since the weather could be briefed in three letters—H-O-T; it was that our major was growing so furious about the technical snafu that it was paralyzing all attempts at analysis. Beloved by higher-ups for brains and PowerPoint wizardry but prone to temper tantrums when subordinates failed to understand his self-contradictory orders, he was the "Staff Officer" stereotype personified. He was, in short, perfect material for a generalship.

I tell this story because Democrats seem to have developed an attachment to generals. In 2004, when John Kerry wanted to project commitment to a strong defense, he surrounded himself with high-ranking retired military officers. (During the Democratic convention that year, twelve retired admirals and generals stepped onto the podium to endorse him.) When the midterms came around in 2006, the liberal online magazine *Salon* proudly noted that two retired generals had called for a Democratic takeover of Congress. And, just recently, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Web site carried statements from five generals endorsing the Iraq Accountability Act, which calls for drawing down the troops.

Well, maybe that helps get us out of Iraq. But if it's military votes you want, that's not the way to do it. That's because most troops *don't like generals*.

Generals don't think like the other 99 percent of troops, because generals are political animals as much as they're military animals. Their career advancement depends greatly on White House and congressional favor. Their subordinates know this. We don't envy them the hassle of juggling politicians, reporters, subordinates, and the salesman and contractors peddling some brilliant new gadget that real troops will think worthless. But we also associate them with air-conditioned Iraqi palaces, aides fetching cold drinks, and hours spent cleaning to prepare for their nice little speech.

That's why once reporters and strangers are out of the room, the real bitching begins. The gist of the complaints is

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consistent: that the military's senior leadership is out of touch with the troops, more concerned with their political safety or financial future than with the sacrifice of leadership. That's rarely been as clear as it is now, when generals have remained largely silent as military training and readiness—especially in the Reserves and the National Guard—have been steadily decimated by an uncertain, fundamentally nonmilitary mission in Iraq.

The difference between a good military leader and a bad one is simple: a good leader has strategic knowledge, tactical competence, and a dedication to troops and country over self; a bad one lacks such traits. The duty to advise civilian political leaders about military strategy requires moral courage. Generals must object to plans that are not militarily sound. Unfortunately, a lot of mediocre leaders are promoted based on their caution or staff work, adding to a self-perpetuating problem. Loyalty to the system matters a great deal for promotion; today's generals pick tomorrow's generals, and they often pick officers who look and think like they do. Unfortunately, this causes many good military leaders to flee. They don't want the frustrations created by micromanagement, inattention to training, or unclear missions. (A 1999 study at Fort Benning, "Home of the Infantry" and notionally the heart of the Army, confirmed what most of us already knew: "leavers" are generally considered to be among the best officers—competent, innovative thinkers that the Army needs most.)

As the war in Iraq grinds on, we see the fruits of such trends. Bluntly put, there's no escaping the role played by top military brass in getting us to this point. Nor can the brass avoid blame for understating the catastrophic implications of White House decisions for military readiness, training, supply, recruiting, medical systems, and overall morale. Even if civilian politicians didn't know how to use their defense resources judiciously, you'd think that generals and admirals, who get paid over $100,000 a year to be the military's far-seeing advocates, would have pointed out the serious disconnect between civilian visions and genuine military capabilities. They might have warned that if the military isn't capable of fulfilling current missions without exhausting itself or instituting a draft, then the military is out of business: Not. Mission. Capable.

To be sure, some generals perform superbly, and some have even sacrificed their careers in order to voice unpopular thoughts. (Witness Eric Shinseki.) Also, every general has been steeped in military ethics emphasizing the importance of civilian control of the military, which makes voicing dissent a delicate matter that must always be weighed against respect for the Constitution. Nevertheless, for too many senior military officials, going along with poorly considered civilian plans has been justified in the name of respect for civilian control. It often looks more like careerism masquerading as principle.

When we see hypocrisy or weakness in leaders, we struggle to honor anything more than the courtesies demanded by rank. Over the last decade, Gen-X and Gen-Y soldiers and leaders have become disillusioned, looking up at a military hierarchy that seems more *Office Space* than *Band of Brothers*. With the military falling apart from the inside out, the last thing we need is undeserved praise heaped on the military senior leadership behind the status quo. Democrats should understand this.

Of course, that troops should have a say in choosing their commander-in-chief is in one sense bizarre. But that doesn't mean they don't embrace the opportunity. For any Democratic candidate genuinely interested in making inroads with the military, learning about the perspectives of enlisted soldiers and lower-ranking officers—not admirals and generals—will be essential. With any luck, such a candidate will come away convinced of the need for greater accountability from the upper ranks, echoing down through subordinate leaders and across to civilian counterparts. At the very least, he or she will begin to grasp the extent of the military's problems today. And anyone who does that—and who can offer some hope of reenergizing the spirit of American service that the military represents—wins.

Captain Melissa Tryon, a Rhodes Scholar and graduate of West Point, is a veteran of the initial ground invasion of Iraq, in which she served in the 101st Airborne Division. She is currently an associate with the Truman National Security Project and a member of Disabled American Veterans, VoteVets, and Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America. The views expressed in this article are hers alone and do not represent the Department of Defense.

Ask Americans to Serve

By Nathaniel Fick

2008 will be the fourth presidential election year since I turned eighteen. In the previous three, I registered once as a Republican, twice as an Independent, and voted once for a Democrat. Pragmatism matters more to me than ideological consistency.

The American political system doesn't always leave much room for people who'd rather vote for policies than for parties. Next November, however, I'll likely side with the candidate who best articulates a sensible international agenda. There are five items on my foreign policy wish list, shaped both by pride at having served alongside our nation's flag in Afghanistan and Iraq and by the reality of having buried too many comrades beneath it.

First, and most important, we must restore the American ideal in the world. Coercion is an inescapable part of

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international politics, but force has never been America's most effective weapon. Our social ideals of liberty, equality, and prosperity are stronger than any fleet or division. After 9/11, nearly the whole world stood with the United States. Less than six years later, I'm uncomfortably conscious of my accent while walking down a London street. The United States can't bully the world into submission, but we mustn't retreat into isolation, either. We must lead, and restore the moral authority that has been such a great source of strength in American history.

Second, I'll vote for someone who makes explicit the three-way relationship between energy, the environment, and national security. These issues cannot remain the polarizing terrain of the far left or the far right. Tie them together, and recognize that energy dependence constricts our strategic options, environmental change poses security challenges of enormous magnitude, and we can either take the lead to shape our own future, or surely be shaped by it. This is one of those rare issues where fact and political expediency may actually converge.

Third, there's one, and only one, threat that could change life as we know it an hour from now: nuclear weapons. This nation has squandered nearly two decades since the end of the cold war without giving the real WMD out there the consideration they demand. Despite the admirable efforts of groups like the Nuclear Threat Initiative, loose nukes, trafficking in fissile material, and the emergence of new nuclear states continue to threaten the planet. But this is not an intractable problem. In the words of Harvard professor Graham Allison, nuclear terrorism is the ultimate *preventable* catastrophe: without loose weapons and fissile material, there can be no nuclear terrorism. So let's get our act together and prevent it.

Fourth, Iraq. The war has passed through three distinct phases: a fairly conventional fight to topple the Hussein regime, a complex insurgency, and, now, an ethnic and sectarian slugfest. American troops, deployed in sufficient numbers, could have had a decent chance of affecting the outcome of the first two phases, but that window of opportunity is slamming shut. Our ground forces are stretched nearly to the breaking point, and conventional U.S. troops will inevitably need to be drawn down in Iraq before a stable society blooms. What that means for the presidential contenders is this: the U.S. has enduring interests in Iraq, and we cannot simply wish ourselves back to February 2003. We must draw down while keeping sufficient forces in the region to deny al-Qaeda a safe haven and to prevent genocide in Iraq. Total withdrawal is irresponsible, and so is talk of deadlines. As then Commandant of the Marine Corps General P. X. Kelley testified before Congress during the debate over pulling U.S. troops out of Lebanon in 1983, "If the time is too short, our enemies will wait us out; if it is too long, they will drive us out." Ambiguity isn't politically comfortable, but it's necessary here.

Finally, in restoring the American ideal and implementing these tangible policies, we need good people to serve in government. Our next president should call on all Americans, not

only on political loyalists, to serve. There is a brain drain in our best universities: many of the most gifted graduates are channeled straight into private-sector jobs without even considering public service. This isn't because young people today are unwilling to work for the common good; it's because they've never been asked. Civic engagement demands more than going shopping, and sacrifice means more than giving up our peace of mind while watching violence on the evening news.

The current crop of Democratic candidates comes reasonably close to meeting the first four points on my wish list. All recognize the need to repair the reputation of the United States. All seem to grasp that the issues of energy, the environment, and security are intertwined. Barack Obama, mentored by Indiana Senator Richard Lugar, has developed expertise in the problem of securing loose nukes. Most of the candidates, apart from Dennis Kucinich, recognize that withdrawal from Iraq will be neither immediate nor complete.

But what I don't, to my great disappointment, hear from any of them is a call for Americans to serve their country. Even Obama, who appears most willing to present grand visions, has shied away from talk of sacrifice. Only Republican John McCain has ventured significantly into such territory in recent years. We need national leaders who will use the bully pulpits of public life to inspire Americans to get involved. If our policies are to reflect our ideals, then the military, the Foreign Service, the intelligence community, and all the other arms of our government must be diverse cross-sections of American society. The ancient Greeks, after all, had a word for those who shun the affairs of the state: *idiotes*.

We are at war, and will remain so for the foreseeable future. What we need from a Democrat at such a time is exactly what we need from a Republican: wise, measured, and inspiring leadership. Part of that involves appealing to our idealism and issuing a genuine call to service. The Democrat who does so will get a lot of votes—and maybe mine. WM

Nathaniel Fick served as a Marine infantry officer in Afghanistan and Iraq. He is the author of the *New York Times* best-seller *One Bullet Away*.

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REUTERS/Carlos Barria

The Bitter End

Democrats are right to push for an end to the Iraq War. But don't expect the troops to be grateful.

By Spencer Ackerman

In 2003, an optimist could hope that the United States would establish a liberal democracy in Iraq. Four years into the war in Iraq, an optimist can hope that a "surge" of 30,000 troops will help stabilize an illiberal, Iran-aligned Shiite government. The tactical merits of the surge matter little when set against a simple truth: successes of any sort have become increasingly modest, and the overall strategic picture has become increasingly grim.

At the local level, as with most wars, there are discrete successes. They do not reverse the larger trend. And, as time goes on, even the good news becomes more ambiguous.

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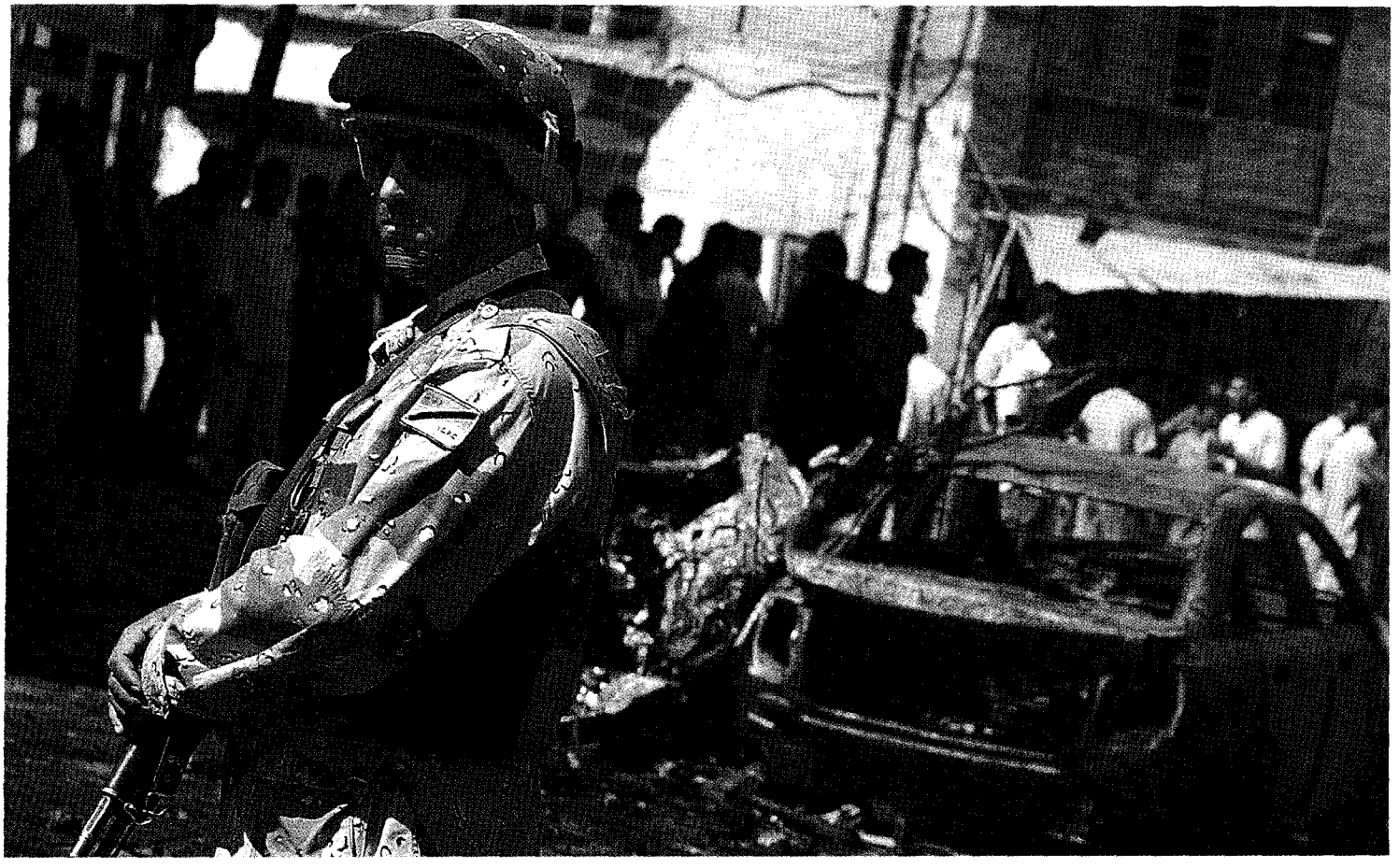

Sectarian violence in the capital is down by about a third since January, but the overall level of violence in the city, in the form of assassinations and bombings, has remained unchanged, prompting a United Nations report in April to criticize the Iraqi government for withholding casualty statistics that might undermine faith in the security plan. Outside of Baghdad, Anbar Province brings encouraging reports suggesting that al-Qaeda is alienating Sunni insurgents. What's also emerging, however, is that many have turned against al-Qaeda for now in the name of prosecuting a better insurgency against the United States later.

The purpose of the surge, which augments by 30,000 a force of roughly 140,000, is, according to General David Petraeus, the U.S. commander in Iraq, to provide "Iraqi leaders [with] the time and space they need to come to grips with the tough political issues that must be resolved." To help the process along, the United States has pushed measures for sectarian compromise, including a change in distribution of oil revenues, a law permitting low-level Baath Party officials back into government, constitutional reform, and a new provincial elections law. But the Iraqi cabinet and parliament, whose dominant Shiite factions are more interested in pressing sectarian advantage than reconciliation, have either slow-walked them or neutered their substance.

To put all this in context: Defense Secretary Robert Gates admitted candidly in mid-March that without sectarian reconciliation among Iraqis the "strategy won't work." Indeed, the entire point of the surge is to bring such reconciliation about by, in Gates's words, "buy[ing] the Iraqis time." But that's the problem. The United States is ever more dearly buying time, and Iraq is ever more freely spending it. As this article goes to press, the parliament is set to embark on a two-month vacation, during which, if current trends hold, 200 more American troops will be killed.

The Democratic Party, fresh from its wins in the midterm elections, understands this. It has finally united around a position on the war: it must end. This spring, Congress passed legislation for supplemental war funding that mandated withdrawal from Iraq by the spring of 2008. President Bush, as was expected, vetoed it.

On the merits of withdrawal, the Democrats have it right. The politics of it, however, remain complicated. It's become common among Democrats to argue for withdrawing from Iraq in the name of the troops. In January, for instance, New York Congressman Jerrold Nadler introduced a bill titled the Protect the Troops and Bring Them Home Act. In February, Congresswoman Lynne Woolsey sent a letter to Bush arguing that it was "time to truly support our troops—by bringing

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them home." Fifteen members of Congress signed on. Senators, too, have been willing to support this idea. Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland said in a February floor speech that "the best way to support our troops serving in Iraq is to say 'NO' to the president's escalation of the war."

Haunted by Vietnam, Democrats are determined to express support for the troops. This is admirable. The truth of the matter, however, is this: many troops in Iraq, perhaps even most of them, want to stay and fight. That doesn't mean that we should stay in Iraq any longer. It does mean, however, that if Democrats want to bridge the divide between themselves and the military—an effort further complicated by their opposition to the war—they're going to have to recognize that arguing in the name of the troops isn't going to work.

To speak to the troops fighting in Iraq is to see a particularly stark difference between their mindset and that of most Americans today. I saw this when, a few weeks into the surge, I traveled to Baghdad to see what the change in tactics looked like on the ground. One of the places I visited, on a hot March afternoon, was a much-heralded "neighborhood outpost" in the Hurriyeh Joint Security Station in western Baghdad. Crammed into the basement of the building, which houses a contingent of Iraqi soldiers and policemen, were soldiers from the 1st Battalion of the 325th Infantry Regiment. I was struck by the griminess of the locale. The air was thick with the smell of dried sweat, and all the light came from a few intensely flickering florescent bulbs. Don't ask about the latrines.

None of this, though, dampened the mood of Lieutenant Jonathan Wellman, a twenty-five-year-old Georgian. His platoon from the 57th Military Police Company, which was partnering with the 1-325 to "mentor" the Iraqi police, had arrived to check the outpost's communications equipment. The task was as irritating as it was important, and one of Wellman's sergeants, bored to tears and uncomfortable standing around in his body armor, mentioned how much better everything would be in Hawaii, where the company would rotate to in a few months.

Wellman wasn't having it. "What do you got in Hawaii that you don't have here?" he asked. "There's sand and beaches. You can't tell the difference."

"Chicks in bikinis," the sergeant felt compelled to note.

"Who needs chicks in bikinis when you got terrorists with AKs?" Wellman retorted. "You can get a hard-on from that."

From Wellman's perspective, the war was going well. "For this district we're at right now, we're past the storm," he told me. Many of his fellow troops in the 57th agreed. Small-arms fire and car bombs were still plaguing Wellman's soldiers, but there had been a measurable drop in violence over the past thirty days. "Now, with the security plan," said Wellman, "my district, it's settling down. And it's only going to get better."

A few days earlier, at the U.S. embassy mess hall, I heard similar sentiments from two majors whom I'll call Smith and Miller. Both had spent 2006 in Iraq and felt an acute sense of despair as sectarianism deepened and security deteriorated. Smith recounted how rampaging militias had been terrorizing Baghdad, littering the streets with corpses. Now, under Petraeus, everything seemed to be changing: "population protection" was the new mission. Miller was similarly enthusiastic. The United States, he said, had finally learned from its compounded mistakes and made the necessary course corrections. "It's the second half," he assured me.

In short, for many troops in Baghdad, the surge had brought a significant boost in morale. When I rode along with the 57th on patrol, they were experiencing the strange comfort of "boring" days without any enemy attacks—so much so that one gunner even admitted to mixed feelings about the lack of combat. After a period of prolonged catastrophe, the sense that events had shifted in favor of the U.S. came as a great relief. "Having momentum on your side, that's so important," explained the company commander, Captain Robert McNellis. "And that's what we feel right now." For this company, the surge wasn't merely an augmentation of troops. It was an augmentation of hope.

Those in the military will be the last people to believe a war is lost, even in the face of nearly impossible odds.

Of course, military opinion varies greatly, and the mindset of the 57th could be atypical. But other journalists have picked up similar sentiments. In early April, National Public Radio's John McChesney visited National Guard troops in Arkansas and found that, "to a man, they were gung-ho for the mission." One specialist told McChesney, "I am looking forward to it. It's going to be a great opportunity for me." And news accounts regularly carry reports of soldiers who are eager to go to Iraq, whether out of a sense of duty or a sense of adventure. (More grimly, many obituaries also mention such eagerness.)

Legal restrictions make it difficult to measure military opinion. Still, the best and most recent measure, the annual *Military Times* poll (which relies on self-selected responses to a mailed questionnaire and as such is nonscientific), found in December that 50 percent of active-duty respondents continued to believe success was likely—and that was even *before* the surge had begun. While that number represents a sharp decline from two years earlier, when 83 percent were optimistic, it still greatly exceeds that of stateside

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civilians, 60 percent of whom favor a pullout from Iraq in 2008, according to the most recent CNN poll. In fact, a plurality of military respondents said they believed that the war requires more troops.

There are other signs that the military has a different view of how things are going: troops deployed to Iraq haven't been voting with their feet. While National Guard units are having trouble meeting recruitment goals, and the active-duty forces are having similar difficulty with certain key specialties, reenlistment rates in the military in general remain surprisingly robust after four years of the war. The 4th Infantry Division and the 101st Airborne Division, both of which spent 2006 in Iraq for the second time, had post-deployment retention rates of 124 percent and 136 percent of their respective targets. Despite a significant rise in frustration inside the military as the war has dragged on, there remains a sizeable base of support for the mission.

Given that troops on the ground, who clearly have a vivid sense of day-to-day rhythms in the conflict, continue to keep faith with the war, can we trust civilians in Washington who favor withdrawal to know better? Many observers of the war trying to make sense of it feel understandably hesitant to substitute their judgment for that of those on the front lines.

While the perspective of those fighting the war needs to inform any debate, it can't determine that debate.

Front-line experience, however, can't definitively speak to the broader question of how a war is going overall. This is especially true in a counterinsurgency, where conditions vary across the country. "For attacks to be down [in Baghdad] may not mean anything," explains Andrew Bacevich, a retired Army colonel and international relations professor at Boston University. "It's indicative of the enemy adjusting, probably, and shifting attacks elsewhere. There's been an increase of violence in Diyala, with all that implies. It doesn't necessarily mean the surge is failing, but we shouldn't be so quick to assume that positive indicators in Baghdad mean the surge is succeeding."

Soldiers may see that their unit is accomplishing its objectives and feel a boost in morale. They may search a house and find a weapons cache, for instance, or they may track down a crucial member of a terrorist cell and take him into custody. Frustratingly, as obvious and long as the list of tactical successes may be, absent dramatic political improvements they rarely coalesce on their own into a change in a counterinsurgency's overall fortunes. And these aren't questions soldiers can afford to concern themselves with. "Once you're engaged, eyeball to eyeball, you tend not to think about those strategic issues at all. You're trying to shoot and shoot back," says retired General Merrill McPeak, a former Air Force chief of staff and Vietnam veteran. "Your entire focus becomes tactical."

In addition, with the bar for success getting increasingly lower, even small improvements feel big. "They have a new commander over there, and at least the appearance and the rhetoric of a new strategy," says military expert Richard Kohn of the University of North Carolina. The soldiers, says Kohn, will tell themselves, "All right, this is it. This is the one last chance." (Indeed, this is almost exactly what Smith and Miller expressed to me.)

Most important, those in the military will be the last people to believe a war is lost, even in the face of nearly impossible odds. Losing a war is almost never the fault of soldiers but, rather, the fault of policy makers and generals, but regular soldiers still feel implicated. To believe in anything but responsibility for victory would "not be living up to their image of themselves in an important way," says Duke University's Christopher Gelpi, who studies civilian-military relations. "That's the whole focus of what this institution is about: succeeding at what missions it has been given. They'll hang on to whatever kind of hope might be left long after everyone else. Succeeding in military missions is who they are." Even with a draftee military in a controversial, futile war like Vietnam, four years passed before frustrations resulted in massive breakdowns in discipline, notes McPeak. An all-volunteer force, which includes thousands who enlisted after the 2003 invasion—and who are therefore self-selected for their optimism—is much better equipped to handle the stress of a difficult war. "The professionalization of the entire structure of the military" has "permeated across the ranks to make it seem all the more durable," argues Bacevich.

All of this leads to a simple point: while the perspective of those fighting the war needs to inform any debate, it can't *determine* that debate. "We don't hire front-line soldiers to make strategic judgments," says Jeffrey Record of the Air War College. "The larger political issues here are well beyond the visibility and responsibility of individual soldiers and even battalion commanders." As Bacevich puts it, "There's no simple answer—that the truth lies in Washington, or in the office of David Petraeus, or in the 3rd Platoon of C Company. Each location provides a perspective and gives an angle on the truth. With regard to the perspective on the war that the troops have, it's certainly the most immediate: they know what happened yesterday. But only in the area of operations for the 3rd Platoon of C Company."

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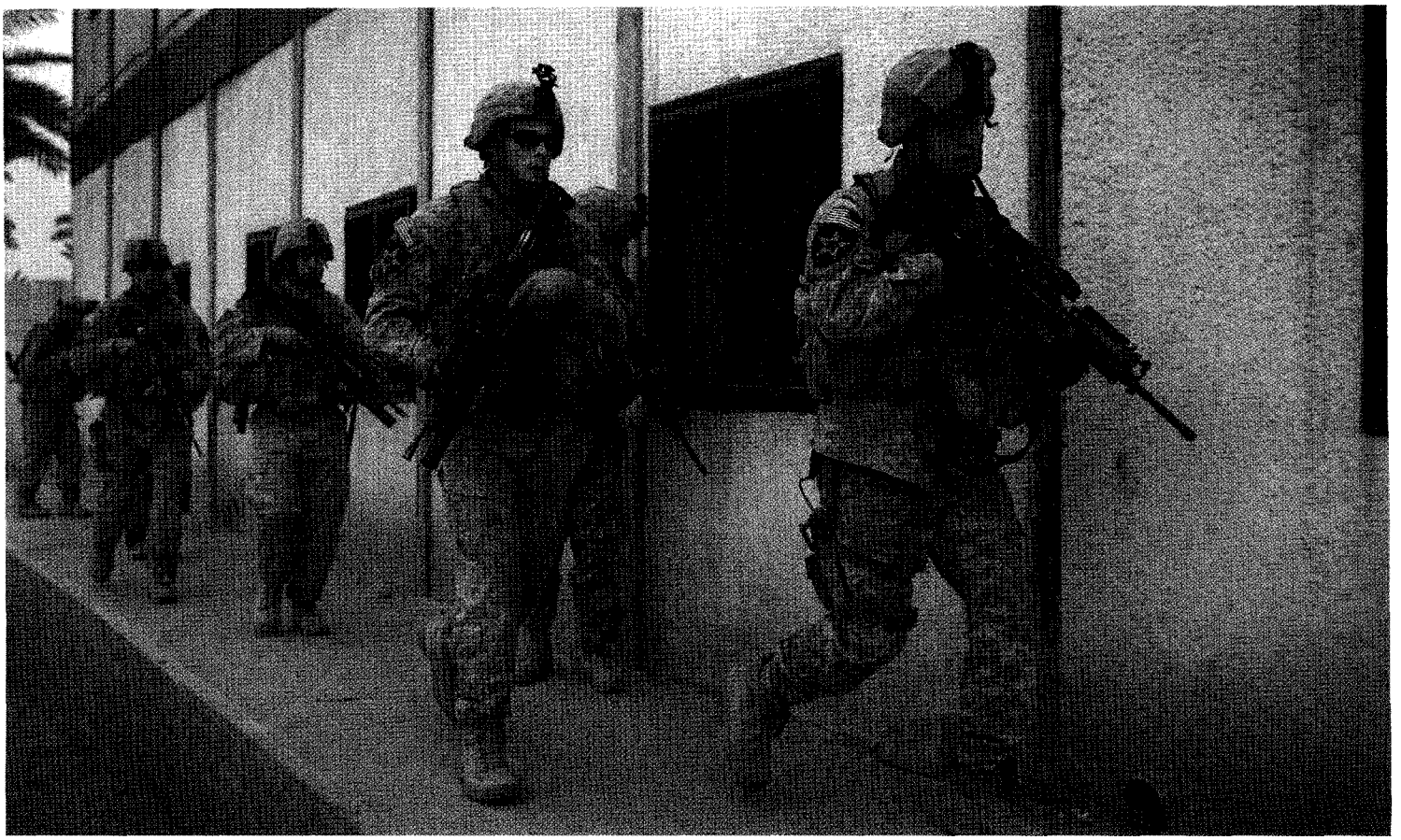

AFP/Getty Images

There's something inherently unseemly about talking about the politics of a war, even if politics infuses all war. Certainly, no amount of political benefit should substitute for considered judgment in figuring out what to do about Iraq. But nothing in the past five years has provided evidence of the war's wisdom, nor has the surge so far contradicted the overall trend, which is that the longer we occupy Iraq, the worse things get. The escalation won't be at full strength until the last of the new brigades arrive this month, and, because one problem all along has been an insufficient number of troops, we can expect that the infusion will bring some benefit—for a while. As has been the pattern all along, however, the enemy will adapt, and sectarian fighting will rage on. The country's descent will continue.

The uncomfortable reality is this: nothing in Iraq worth fighting for remains achievable, and nothing achievable in Iraq remains worth fighting for. Democrats have made the decision—rightly, I think—that withdrawing from Iraq is the least bad of many bad options. But they shouldn't kid themselves into thinking that a majority of the troops doing the fighting agree with them. For soldiers like Lieutenant Wellman, this will be hard to accept. As he told me of war doubters back home, "I don't want them to just support the troops. I want them to support the mission." This matters, because pretending that in ending the war they're doing the troops a favor hurts Democrats politically. They risk looking condescending, and, worse, oblivious—which has the broader effect of undermining public trust in the Democrats to handle national security. More basically, it does a disservice to those who serve. For soldiers who are optimistic, being told that the war can't be won is bad enough. But to be told that politicians are doing them a favor by extricating them from a mission they believe in is downright insulting.

Democrats would do much better to speak honestly: to acknowledge that many fighting men and women want to stay in the battle and would be willing to do so for years longer. There's nothing wrong with saying that, nor in emphasizing that this is part of what makes us so proud of our military. We wouldn't want soldiers who were *unwilling* to fight to the bitter end. Elected officials, however, have to judge what they believe to be in the national interest, and that means calling an end to the occupation of Iraq. Soldiers like Wellman won't agree, but if Democrats can at least signal that they acknowledge and respect his point of view, they'll have a better chance at getting Wellman to respect their own. And meeting partway is a lot better than not meeting at all. WM

Spencer Ackerman is a senior correspondent for the *American Prospect* and a national security correspondent for the *Washington Monthly*.
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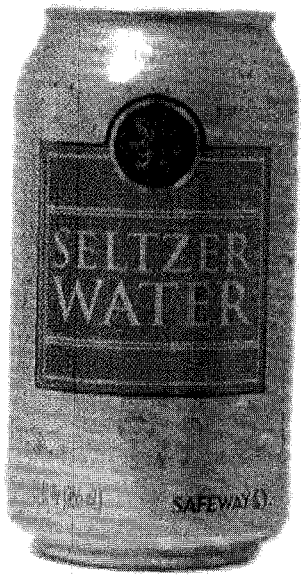

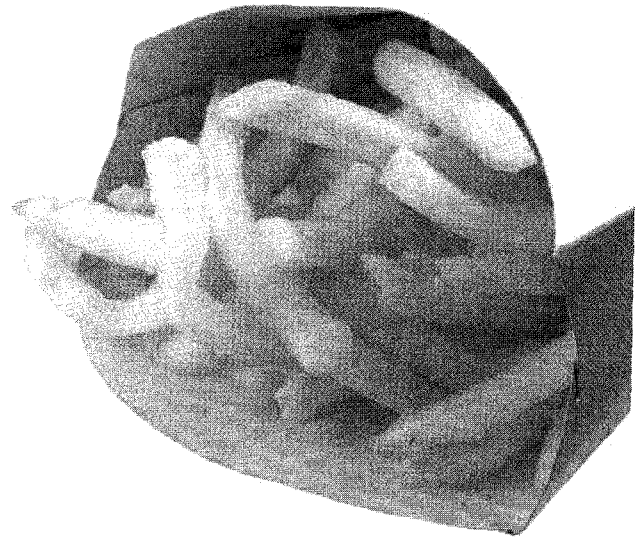

Seltzer is junk food but French fries are fine*

*At least according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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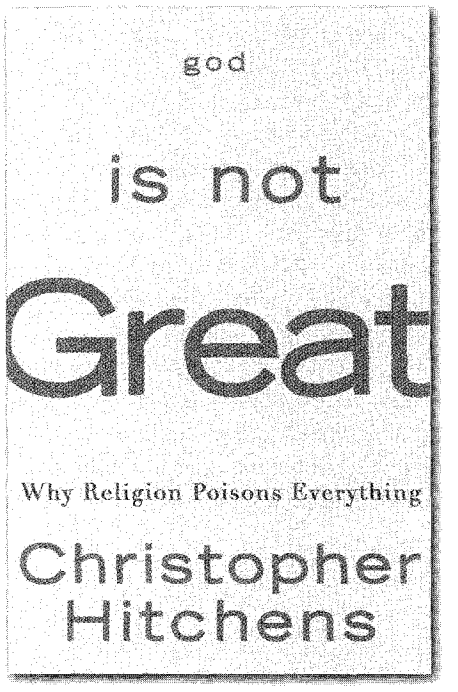
Bad Faith Effort

Christopher Hitchens phones in a polemic against religion.

By Paul Baumann



God Is Not Great: Why Religion Poisons Everything
by Christopher Hitchens
Twelve, 294 pp.

It will come as no surprise to those who watch cable TV, or who read *Vanity Fair* or *Slate* or the *Atlantic*, that Christopher Hitchens is mad as hell and isn't going to take it anymore. For years the indefatigable Hitchens—political columnist, ardent biographer of George Orwell, and self-styled scourge of liberal correctness—has fulminated against assorted political errors and villains du jour. The object of Hitchens's current rage, however, is a little out of the ordinary; in fact, it is by definition out of this world. Yes, Hitchens has finally set his sights on the ultimate culprit: he has put God, and all who profess a belief in such an infuriatingly elusive and paradoxical entity, in the dock.

In his most recent book, *God Is Not Great: Why Religion Poisons Everything*, Hitchens joins the cadre of proselytizing atheists currently cross-examining religious texts and traditions in an attempt to demonstrate both the superiority of science and secular humanism to religion, and the gross delusion of those who insist on perceiving a transcendental presence in the world. Hitchens himself experienced a kind of conversion in recent years, abandoning his column at the *Nation* in a well-publicized spasm of apostasy from the left to emerge after 9/11 as a pugnacious defender of interventionist foreign policy in general and the war against Iraq in particular. Indeed, if we are to take Hitchens at his word, his new book was written to combat the resurgence of superstition and religious fanaticism exemplified by the rise of Islamic jihadism—and also to some extent by Christian evangelicalism, Jewish millennialism, and Hindu fundamentalism. Hitchens says he is out to defend "secular pluralism and ... the right not to believe or be compelled to believe." This defense, he warns, "has now become an urgent and inescapable responsibility: a matter of survival." (It isn't clear just who is forcing Hitchens to disavow his atheism.)

A work that sets out a rigorous defense of such basic human rights might be urgently needed, but this book is certainly not it. Instead, what Hitchens serves up in *God Is Not Great* is a mishmash of didacticism, innuendo, chest-thumping bluster, rhetorical legerdemain, misinformation, and smug demagoguery. God, he proclaims, does not exist, and consequently all religions are bunk. "Monotheistic religion is a plagiarism of a plagiarism of a hearsay of a hearsay, of an illusion of an illusion, extending all the way back to the fabrication of a few nonevents." Religious traditions have primarily been responsible for "stupidities and cruelties," "ignorance and superstition," and so on.

Where to begin with a book that is so comprehensively wrongheaded, riddled from cover to cover with errors and misconceptions? I'll start with its author's nearly evangelical fervor about Darwin. Hitchens insists, with overbearing certainty, that human life is the accidental product of a random, purposeless process, and only our "vanity" and fear of death cause us to think otherwise. Like the Darwinist popularizers Richard

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Dawkins (*The God Delusion*) and Daniel Dennett (*Breaking the Spell*), he dismisses religion as an infantile fixation, a remnant of "the childhood of our species." It is time for the deluded to grow up and embrace the self-evident truths of science, especially evolutionary biology.

As many philosophers have pointed out, however, Darwinism cannot explain the origin of the universe, the origins of life, or the existence of the laws of nature. Nor can Hitchens's dogmatic materialism explain consciousness, free will, intentionality, or the fundamental intersubjectivity that characterize our everyday experience of the world. As the philosopher Thomas Nagel—no friend of religion himself—wrote in disputing Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, a solely materialistic conception of reality just doesn't compute. "The fear of religion leads too many scientifically minded atheists to cling to a defensive, world-flattening reductionism," Nagel observes. Human beings, he reminds us, have more than one form of understanding. "The great achievements of physical science do not make it capable of encompassing everything, from mathematics to ethics to the experiences of a living animal. We have no reason to dismiss moral reasoning, introspection or conceptual analysis as ways of discovering the truth just because they are not physics."

It is precisely the world of moral reasoning, introspection, and conceptual analysis to which religion gives expression. Hitchens's denigration of illiterate and "primitive" peoples in *God Is Not Great* reveals an enormous ignorance about the moral and philosophical sophistication of our ancestors. Symbolic reasoning is not confined to mathematics and the written word, but has often found expression in totemism and other seemingly irrational beliefs. Yet the idea of religious ritual as a form of knowledge, or possibly even truth—one obviously closer to poetry than to philosophical proof—never occurs to Hitchens. Though he presents himself as a champion of the "ironic and inquiring" against the "literal and limited mind," frequently he sounds like a petulant adolescent who demands every poem he reads be paraphrased in order to make its meaning "plain."

As a consequence, he tosses off countless howlers, like describing the Catholic belief in the "real presence" of Christ in the bread and wine of the sacrament of the Eucharist as "pretending to eat human flesh and drink human blood, in the person of Christ himself." Not even the most untutored Catholic thinks he is participating in an act of cannibalism when receiving communion. Eating the bread and drinking the wine is a symbolic action, one in which Christ is understood to be present in the form of

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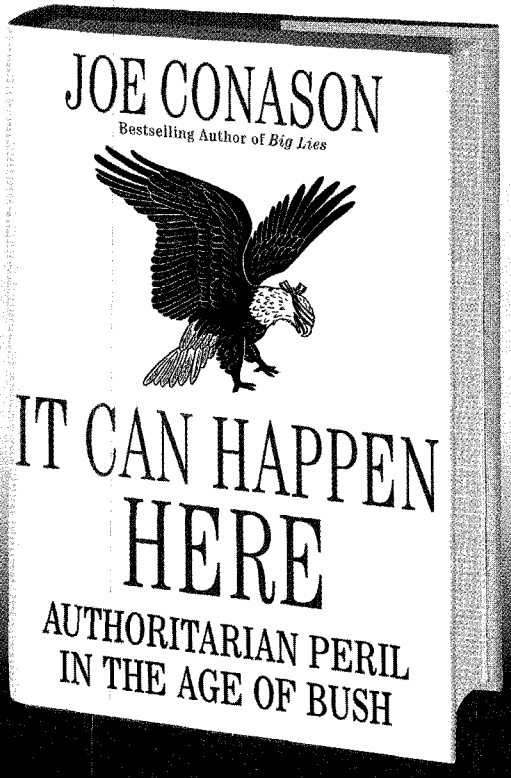

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bread and wine, yet for believers nevertheless "really" present. Where Hitchens sees only the prose of religious practice, more learned and curious observers recognize complex symbol systems that enable practitioners to grasp reality as a whole while daring to hope that life has a personal meaning, not merely a material existence.

And so to all the witty and necessary things that have been said about the dangers and crudities of religious belief, *God Is Not Great* adds not one memorable line or phrase. The problem lies partly in its author's bellicose attitude, but also in the limitations of what comes across as a strangely impoverished imagination. Hitchens seems to think that educated Christians and Jews remain biblical literalists, and he sees scripture and religious ritual as failed attempts to explain how the natural world works, explanations we can now rely on science for. But religion is not a primitive form of physics or engineering. As sociologists and anthropologists have demonstrated, religion addresses the social world, not the natural one. As for biblical literalism, the inadequacy of that approach to scripture was evident to St. Augustine 1,600 years ago. Even the fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan, of Scopes trial fame, recognized that the "days of creation" referred to in Genesis had to be interpreted symbolically. (The anti-evolutionary stance of many contemporary evangelicals is at bottom less about the science than about the social and moral implications of Darwinian notions like the survival of the fittest. Who determines what is taught in the public schools is also a major concern for evangelicals.) No intellectually serious Jew or Christian is under the impression that human life began in a garden or that the first humans were misled by a talking snake. No, the believers whom Hitchens excoriates are not the literalists—Hitchens himself is.

One of Hitchens's most risible contentions is that even the actions of great "mammals" such as Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran theologian executed in 1945 for his role in a plot to kill Hitler, are better understood stripped of their religious pretensions. (In making his case against the solipsism and vanity supposedly inculcated by religion, Hitchens repeatedly and annoyingly refers to his fellow homo sapiens as "mammals," to drive home the fact that humans are animals, something he falsely believes religion denies.) His airbrushing of history transfigures the achievements of King and Bonhoeffer into triumphs of humanism, not Christian faith.

Even those who share Hitchens's contempt for religion may consider this sleight of hand a kind of vandalism, if not outright sacrilege. According to Hitchens, furthermore, King was only a nominal Christian, because he forgave those who persecuted him instead of condemning them to hell. Like so much of what Hitchens writes, this is a smirking punch line, not an argument. Yes, Christianity long promulgated a rather terrifying doctrine of eternal damnation for sin. Hitchens, however, fails to acknowledge the complementary doctrine of infinite forgiveness, best expressed in Christ's own words on the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Indeed, reading Hitchens on morality or religion reveals a stunning theological illiteracy. The description of Bonhoeffer's faith as an "admirable but nebulous humanism" fails to understand that Bonhoeffer (like King) was indeed a humanist, but he was a Christian first. It's possible to be both: in fact, for a Christian it's required.

And so to all the witty and necessary things that have been said about the dangers and crudities of religious belief, Hitchens adds not one memorable line or phrase.

God Is Not Great is stuffed with tendentious nonsense; readers venturing into Hitchens's diatribe will find themselves misinformed everywhere, and in brazenly opportunistic ways. Jesus "both *wished* and *needed* to die," Hitchens insists, which gets the traditional theology exactly backward. The Jews invited "hatred and suspicion" by proclaiming Israel to be God's "chosen" people—a hoary canard that ignores the fact that the God of the Bible also made a covenant with the people of all other nations, and that his covenant with the Jews made them not privileged overseers, but a light unto other nations. Many pages are devoted to denouncing the "atrocity" of male circumcision as well as the "hideous consequences of the masturbation taboo," the latter of which is surely the most unenforceable and least observed of religious strictures.

Elsewhere Hitchens gets caught up in tangled contradiction. Aware, for example, that his deterministic naturalism cannot offer a rational guide for morality, he urges us to turn to literature—but turning to literature to escape religion is like thinking you can go for a swim in the ocean without getting wet. And when he urges us to replace religion with "unfettered scientific inquiry" and its "promise of near-miraculous advances in healing," one wonders exactly how unfettered he wants Pfizer or Biogen or the nuclear industry to be. Hitchens advertises himself as a pugnacious skeptic, yet his irony melts away into Chamber of Commerce cheerleading when he conjures up our glorious technological future. Perhaps he was carried away by the inevitable corollary of this familiar rationalist utopian fantasy, namely, the final "divorce between the sexual life and fear, and the sexual life and disease, and the sexual life and tyranny." Well, as long as the antibiotics hold out, I suppose.

There is a curious moment halfway through *God Is Not Great* when Hitch-

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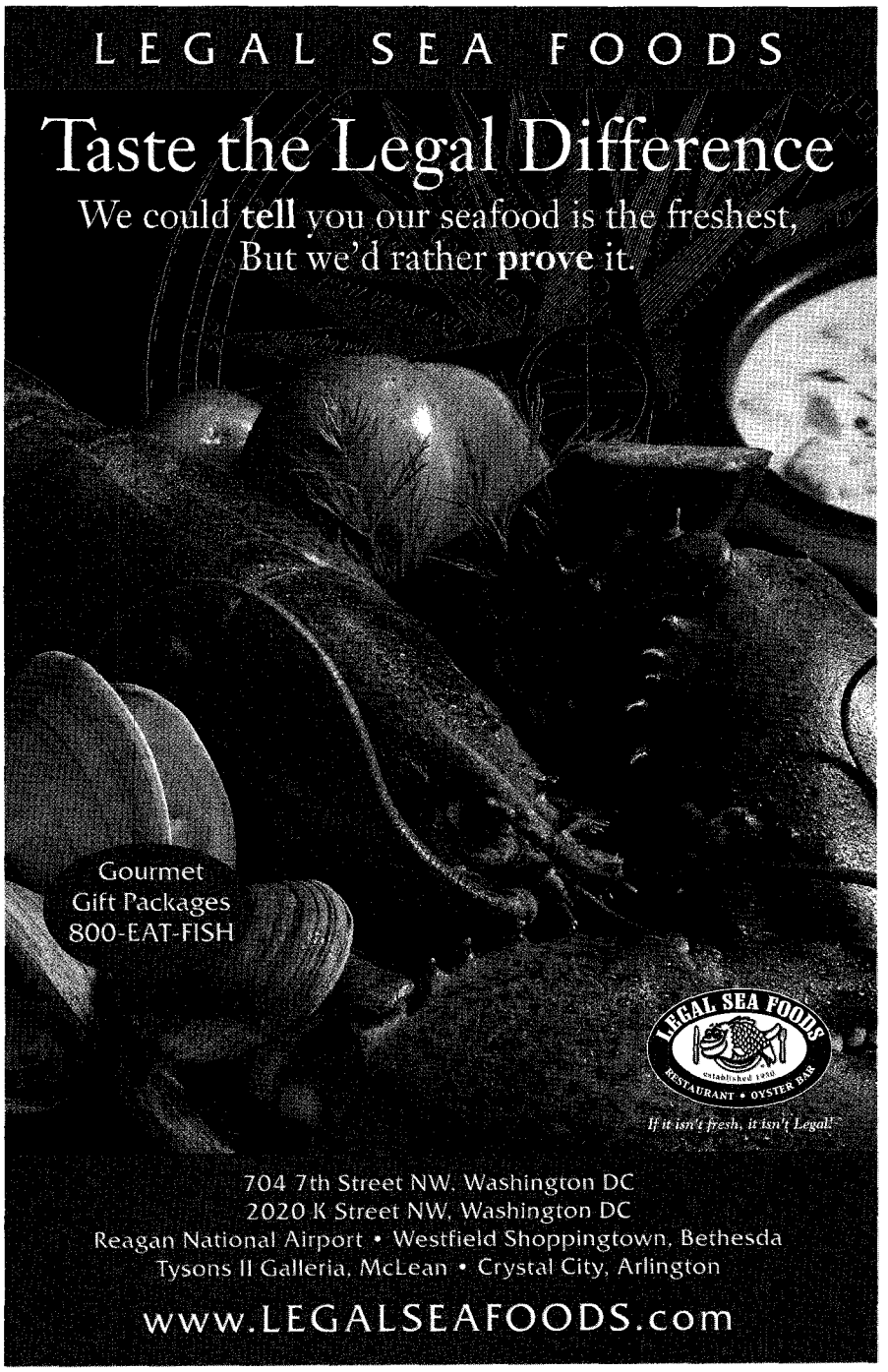
ens, in an attempt to sympathize with those he has so exuberantly disparaged, confesses that he himself once succumbed to the false allure of religion. Seduced by the "unquenchable yearning of the poor and oppressed to rise above the strictly material world and to achieve something transcendent," he placed his hopes and trust in Marxism, specifically in its Trotskyite sect. Eventually, however, he realized that the longing for a "total solution" to humanity's problems—a longing he now insists is the essence of the religious instinct—had led Marxist true believers to commit or excuse the most appalling crimes. "Those of us who had sought a rational alternative to religion had reached a terminus that was comparably dogmatic," he writes. Comparably? Surely the dogmatism and violence of Soviet totalitarianism, like that of the other totalitarian movements of the twentieth century, far outdistanced that of any traditional religion.



Such oversights may be more tactical than careless. Assessing the political implications of religion, Hitchens shows himself to be a tricky rhetorician. For instance, it is a commonplace to note that Stalinism and Nazism tried to replace religion, and in doing so appropriated many of its functions. Hitchens argues that totalitarians were murderous because their ambitions were religious in nature—and religious because they were totalitarian. Such tautological trickery ignores the fact that these were explicitly atheistic regimes, determined to destroy *all* competing centers of authority or power. Traditional Christianity and Judaism contain a profound ambivalence about the uses of political power, but atheistic totalitarianism had no such ambivalence about the unchecked power of the state. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" is *not* the dogma of a totalitarian. Hitchens is under the impression that he has outgrown his need for the type of "total solution" Marxism offered, but in reality all he has done is exchange the "scientific materialism" of Marx for the equally crude materialism of scientism. Thus he is able, in fewer than 300 pages, to dispense with a phenomenon whose study has filled libraries. Case closed.

Amazingly, *God Is Not Great* offers itself as a kind of ideological primer for America's global war on terror. "[I]t has become necessary to know the enemy," Hitchens writes, "and to prepare to fight it." Indeed, Islamic jihadism is a serious threat, but a limited one. Hitchens is right that we must know our enemy in order to defeat him. As we are now in a protracted fight with certain Islamic zealots, it is crucial to understand their thinking and their grievances, if for no other reason than to better anticipate their actions. Alas, the contempt and vilification Hitchens lavishes on his religious enemies are no substitute for real

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knowledge. And since he thinks religion is nothing more than stupidity, credulousness, and fear, he has little incentive to learn any more about Muslim believers than he does about Christians.

Unrepentant in his advocacy of the war in Iraq, Hitchens continues to defend the credibility of the Bush administration's accusations regarding Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and collaboration with al-Qaeda. It is one of the unintended ironies of this book that while religious belief can be airily dismissed with quips like "exceptional claims demand exceptional evidence," the standard for taking a nation to war is evidently less stringent.

Finally, beyond identifying this or that particular enemy, the larger question remains: Is ridding the world of religion the best way to preserve secular pluralism and freedom of conscience? Would the world in fact be a better, freer place without religion? I doubt it. In the history of the United States alone, for instance, committed religious believers were instrumental in the struggle for independence and a constitutional democracy, the abolition of slavery, the fight for women's suffrage, and the victories of the labor and civil rights movements. In Poland and elsewhere in Europe, meanwhile, the victims of totalitarianism found solace and a focus for resistance in the surprisingly empowering "illusions" of religion. So have many devout Chinese.

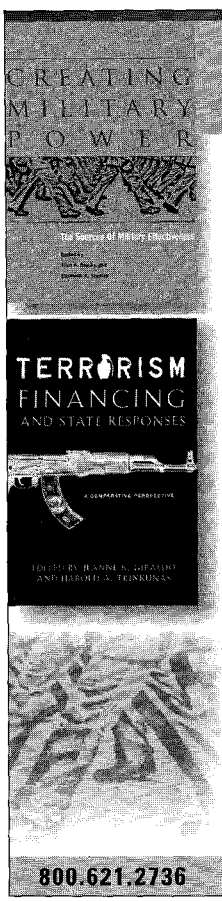
Like any other enduring human activity—science, sex, baseball—religion can be misused, and Hitchens is in good company when he denounces religious violence, intolerance, and obscurantism. But his contention that religion has always and everywhere been the enemy of civilization and human dignity is absurd. Many politically engaged modern thinkers are far more cautious in assessing religion's moral and political value. Czeslaw Milosz, Polish poet and Nobel laureate, who knew what it was like to live in a society organized around the "concept of a total solution," would have recognized Hitchens's effort to extirpate religion as a total solution in its own right. "For me the religious dimension is extremely important," Milosz said. "Piety protects us against nihilism."

Vaclav Havel, who also lived under a regime dedicated to a purely materialistic philosophy, is convinced that conscience falters without a transcendent referent. Democracy, Havel argues in *The Art of the Impossible*, must "rediscover and renew its own transcendental origin. It must renew its respect for the nonmaterial order which is not only above us but also in us and among us." The loss of this respect, Havel writes, "always leads to loss of respect for everything else."

The political lessons of the murderous twentieth century are quite the opposite of those Hitchens puts forth in *God Is Not Great*. Our democratic faith that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights" is not a proposition that unaided reason, evolutionary biology, or history can easily vindicate. Asked for evidence that all men are created equal and endowed with certain rights, we do not and cannot look to science—and least of all to Darwin.

Like religion, a belief in the inherent dignity and sanctity of human life is a truth revealed to us in ways that science can neither confirm nor deny. Thomas Jefferson, a thinker Hitchens likes to quote as a critic of religion, asked if "the liberties of a nation [can] be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?" It has been mankind's nearly universal instinct to link the respect we owe each other to the obedience owed the creator, an obedience that is guided by reason, not by ignorance or superstition. Hitchens provides us with little evidence that his ersatz religion of materialism, evolution, and "unfettered scientific progress" will anchor those liberties more soundly. WM

Paul Baumann is the editor of *Commonweal*.



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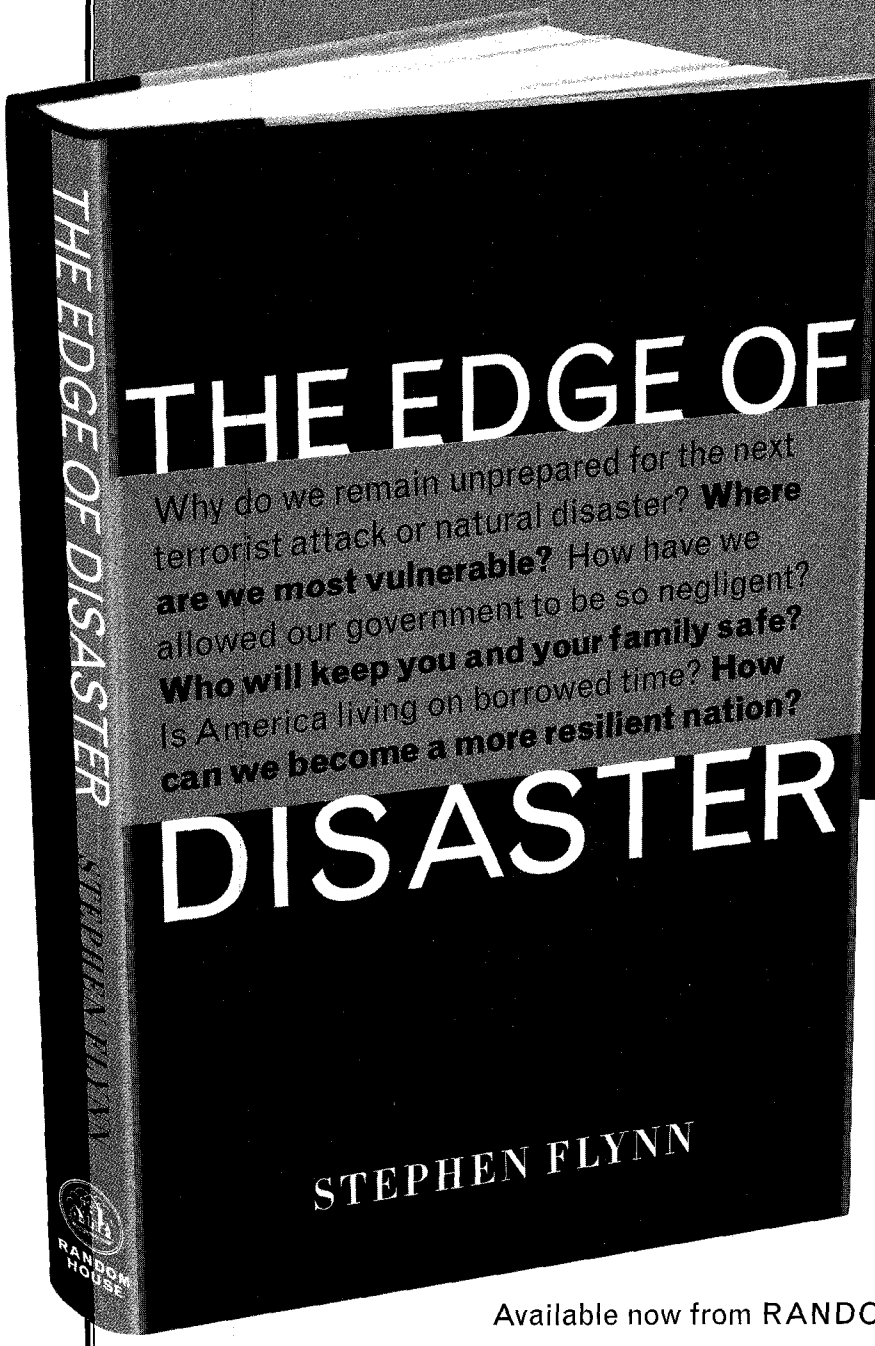

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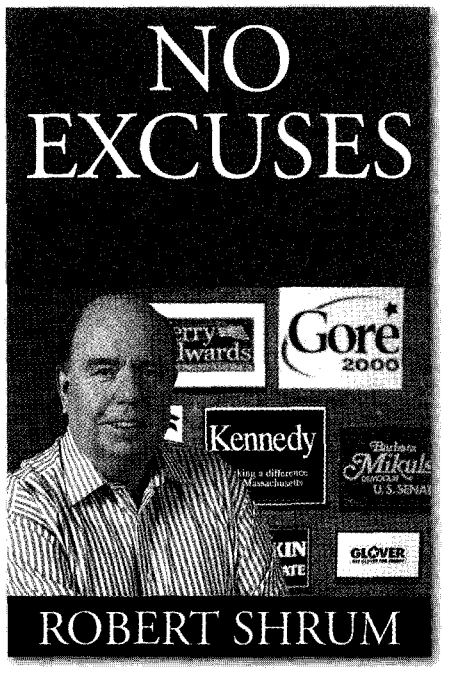
Shrum and Dumber

Memoirs of the man who thrice saved us from a Democratic presidency

By Matthew Yglesias



No Excuses: Concessions of a Serial Campaigner

by Robert Shrum
Simon & Schuster, 544 pp.

Walking around Washington, D.C., telling people you're reading Bob Shrum's forthcoming memoir turns out to be a fantastic small-talk gambit. People are astounded, confused, sympathetic. Someone gave him a *book deal*? Who would read that? Who would buy it? Good questions, all. But none quite as good as the question of why Shrum wrote the book.

Not, it seems, because he has any particular point to make about campaigns and elections in America, the role of the political consultant in the contemporary Democratic Party, the future of progressive politics, or, indeed, much of anything at all. His tide of anecdotes will entertain anyone interested in horse-race politics and not averse to a little name-dropping (did you know Bob Shrum met Laurence Tribe before he was famous? and Bill Clinton? and James Carville? do you care?), but in his own retelling they add up to almost nothing. A lifetime working at the highest levels of political hackdom, and he's reached essentially no conclusions on any subject of interest—or, if he has reached any, he seems disinclined to share them. Instead of a book making some point about the world, he's written what is, in effect, Shrum's last campaign—a race to save his much-tattered reputation as a perennial loser, a man who's lost more presidential campaigns than anyone else alive.

No Excuses: Concessions of a Serial Campaigner is the title, and the candidate does an admirable job of staying mostly on message, when one takes into account the considerable temptations to backslide. Rather than providing excuses, Shrum wants us to believe, in essence, that his reputation has been sullied unfairly by a cabal of unscrupulous, backbiting Clintonite centrists who have sought to trample him, the progressive standard-bearer who's been fighting for you, the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party.

And, indeed, Shrum is fairly persuasive in arguing that his bad reputation largely *is* the result of the backbiting, unprincipled ways of the corrupt cabal of establishment political consultants. Unfortunately, the role of crusading outsider fits Shrum about as well as it fit Al Gore, as this voluminous account of his career makes perfectly clear. Rather, his assessments of political figures and policies are fundamentally grudge-based. The single most loathed figure in the book is Jimmy Carter, who had the temerity to win both the Democratic nomination and the White House after Shrum quit his campaign during a bleak stretch in the 1976 primaries. After Carter's victory, Shrum's career outlook looked bleak. Fortunately for him, Ted Kennedy was willing to give the young speechwriter a job based on his previous work for Ed Muskie and George McGovern, and he served the liberal lion well. A few years later, as a member of the inner circle, Shrum pushed hard in favor of Kennedy's 1980 primary challenge to the incumbent. To a remarkable extent, Shrum *still* appears to stand by absolutely every criticism the Kennedy campaign ever made of Carter—that his Afghanistan policy risked plunging the world into nuclear war, and that wage and price controls were the solution to America's late-1970s economic woes—and even tries to hold Carter responsible for the

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rise of al-Qaeda, though Osama bin Laden was but a college student during Carter's presidency.

Kennedy lost, of course, but kept his seat in the Senate. Carter, meanwhile, was shown the door by the voters in November, no doubt weakened in part by the need to fend off Kennedy's vigorous intraparty challenge. The resulting Reagan administration was a disaster for the poor and working-class Americans on whose behalf Shrum thinks of himself as toiling, but something of a boon for Shrum himself. With Carter in the White House he was, at best, a nobody who'd alienated the most important Democrats in town. With Carter gone, he was a speechwriter for the most famous Democrat in Congress—and by most accounts a good one.

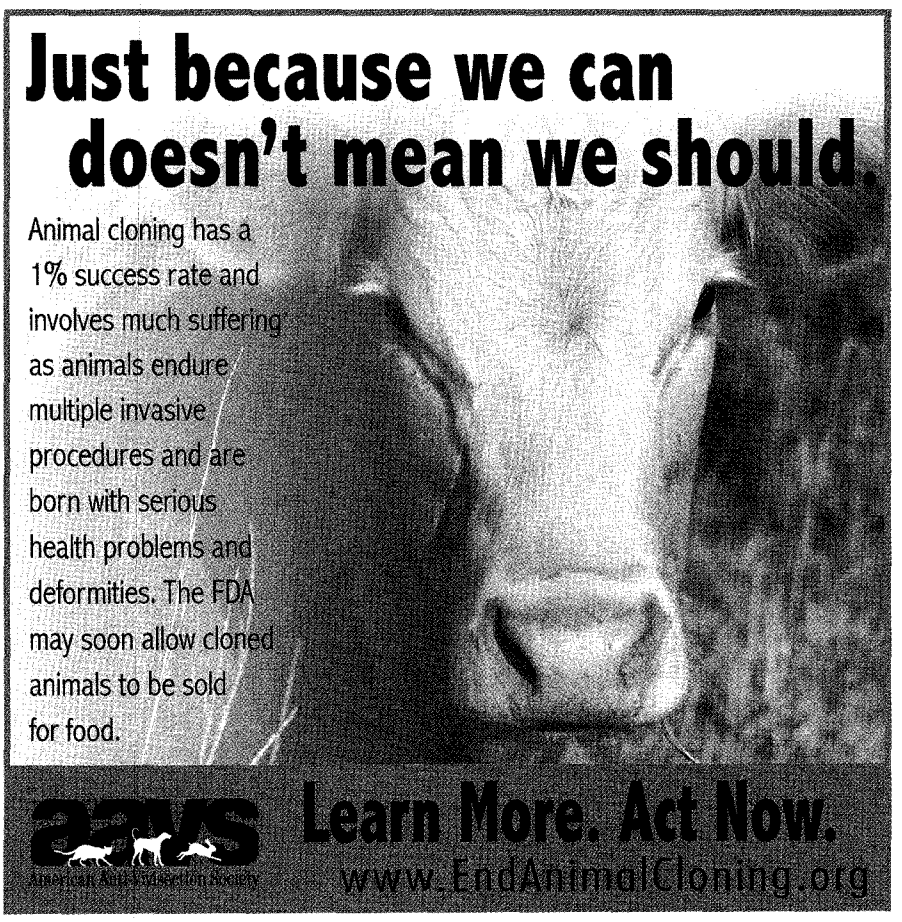
This is where the story gets both weird and all too typical. After working for years on Kennedy's staff, Shrum decided he wanted to become a political consultant.

The consultant's racket, especially on the Democratic side, is a good one to break into. Clients who lose wind up leaving office, losing power and stature. The D.C. power structure, meanwhile, is composed of winners, some of whose campaigns you probably worked for in the past. Even better, it's fairly rare for an incumbent to lose, so once you have some significant politicians in your Rolodex you don't need to be especially good at your job to rack up wins. Challengers who hire you and win are in your debt. Challengers who hire you and lose are yesterday's news. And challengers who want credibility with the big-dollar fundraisers and other party kingmakers need to demonstrate that credibility by hiring someone from the circle of established consultants.

It's nice work, if you can get it. And having a powerful senator like Kennedy in your corner is a good way to get it. Never mind that there's no reason to think a person well suited to the job of writing speeches for Kennedy's booming voice, outsize personal story and legacy, and passionate brand of politics would actually be good at a generic political strategist's job. The point, however, is not that Shrum was especially unqualified for his consultant's gig, but that his story stands in for that of his entire profession. Campaign operatives who succeed in any subfield reach for the prize of consultanthood, whether or not there's reason to think they'll be good at it. More to the point, once they reach that prize, it's extremely difficult to dislodge them from it.

Even better, it's well-compensated work. Democratic consultants are in the enviable position of both earning a percentage of their clients' ad buys and deciding how much money their clients spend on ads. This is an obviously absurd arrangement; it can hardly be expected to do anything but hurt the effectiveness of Democratic campaigns by building in a clear bias at the margin in favor of large television ad buys instead, as well as a bias at the margin in favor of fundraising against other possible campaign activities. This arrangement has been much criticized in the press (including this magazine) and in the progressive blogosphere, but has proven stubbornly resistant to change, itself a testament to the essentially monopolistic nature of the Democratic consulting trade. On the Republican side, by contrast, there is more competition and openness to new blood, and consultants get flat fees rather than a percentage. Shrum briefly addresses the controversy and dismisses the notion that Democratic consultants should ape their GOP counterparts by observing that Republicans can make up for lost earnings with corporate PR work.

But, of course, Democratic consultants also do corporate work on the side. What's more, altering the nature of consultants' compensation packages wouldn't necessarily entail paying them less money. In the first instance, the point of moving from a percentage-based fee to a flat fee would be to



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remove bias from the decision-making process, and cut down on wasteful ad spending, not wasteful consultant spending per se.

Be that as it may, once Shrum was safely ensconced in the ranks of consultantdom, his candidate roster showed no particular ideological profile, meandering from Bob Casey to Joe Biden to Dick Gephardt to, eventually, the 1992 presidential campaign of not-very-liberal Nebraska Senator Bob Kerrey (of whom Shrum remarks, "I've never been sure what kind of president he would have been," which tends to undermine Shrum's claims to having been a conviction-driven political operative). After Kerrey's loss, Shrum is surprised to be locked out of Bill Clinton's general election campaign on the grounds that Hillary is upset by rumors that Shrum was gossiping with George McGovern about Bill's extracurricular sexual escapades. This Shrum seems to feel is a bum rap, though he does admit he passed on to McGovern an unsubstantiated secondhand rumor about Clinton hitting on Ron Brown's daughter.

Clinton and Shrum eventually patched things up to some extent, but Shrum's relationship with the White House remained tense, leading, eventually, to the pathetic spectacle of the 2000 presidential campaign. Gore, in what even in Shrum's telling looks like a fit of pique, hired Shrum, the major Democratic consultant least associated with Clinton, to run his campaign and provide him with an independent political profile—even though nothing in Gore's political record suggested the existence of any important substantive disagreements with Clinton's approach. Next, in a fit of counter-pique, Clinton's political advisers embarked on a program of consistently trashing the Gore campaign every time it deviated from the political formula of 1996, and Shrum countered by declining to see any political upside whatsoever to Clinton's high job approval ratings and the general atmosphere of peace and prosperity. So consumed is Shrum by the quest for vindication in his struggles with Clinton's political team that he manages to recount the 2000 campaign without bothering to discuss Ralph Nader.

Tumble forward into 2004, where three of the four leading Democratic presidential contenders—Gephardt, Kerry, and Edwards—were all Shrum clients. What's more, on the most important moral and political issue of the day, they all broke the wrong way, supporting the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Shrum concedes that he urged his clients to do this, going so far as to say that he prevailed upon Kerry and Edwards to opportunistically endorse a war they knew was wrong. Most astoundingly, he clearly regards this claim as something that will be *helpful* to the politicians in question, a misjudgment that would seem to speak volumes about the difficulty his clients have had in winning presidential elections. The "Shrum primary," in the end, went to Kerry over Edwards for reasons that go unexplained save for two facts: Kennedy advocated (but what did he say?) on Kerry's behalf, and Shrum set about the difficult task of winning an election dominated by national security in which one candidate was running as a supporter of a war that neither he nor his chief strategist thought was a good idea.

Campaign operatives who succeed in any subfield reach for the prize of consultanthood, whether or not there's reason to think they'll be good at it.

Here at last, the no-excuses mantra breaks down. "Democrats hated Bush so fiercely—and 'hate' is the right word—that they assumed Kerry should have beaten him easily," when in fact, Shrum says, running "in a 9/11 election against a wartime president who wrapped himself in that tragedy" was an objectively difficult proposition.

He, Shrum, fails to grapple with his own admission that the war vote was a mistake, for if voting in favor of the Iraq resolution was a political and substantive error in a race against "a wartime president" then it was surely a *very big* mistake. Similarly, to gloss the power of the flip-flop charge with the observation that Kerry "colossally misspoke on the $87 billion" is to essentially miss the point. Kerry marketed himself to Democratic primary voters explicitly as the candidate of political expediency, and got tagged in the general election as, well, the candidate of political expediency. Indeed, in retrospect what's shocking about the miscalculation on the war vote is less its simplistic nature—the war authorizing resolution was high-profile and popular, so Shrum advised his clients to vote for it. But neither Kerry nor Edwards was in a tough 2002 reelection battle. It didn't matter whether or not the resolution was popular. A politician who took a stand against it would have two years to wait for events to vindicate his view. As, indeed, the skepticism about the war that Shrum attributes to Kerry and Edwards was vindicated by election day 2004. Which might have done them some good had they actually made the right call. The view that good policy is good politics sounds sappy and naive, but on this kind of issue it's true—the first thing you need to ask yourself when trying to decide whether or not backing some invasion will be politically savvy is what you think will happen if the invasion actually takes place.

One could imagine situations where merits and political imperatives pull in opposite directions, but as a general matter substantive insight into foreign policy will be more useful—even from a crassly political point of view—than will the latest polling num-

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How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World

Joshua Kurlantzick

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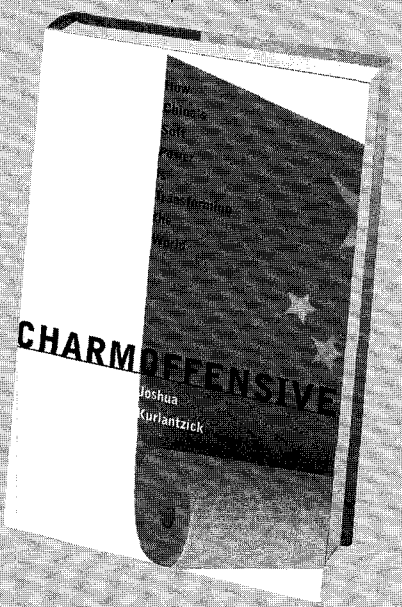

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bers. Nominally, Shrum agrees with this premise, observing that "if the party doesn't stand for something more than a set of poll-tested programs and a carefully engineered set of tactics to win office then we are likely to lose unless the Republicans hand us victory on a platter of indisputable failure or perceived economic crisis." This is offered, however, not in the spirit of self-critique, but as a slam on intraparty rivals: "And then what will we have to show for our power but time in office, modest or symbolic change, or achievements like the Clinton deficit reduction that don't stand the test of time?"

As with most of Shrum's critiques of his rivals, the statement is accurate but applies to him just as much as anyone else. Indeed, his clients seem no less likely than anyone else's to fall into the Democratic trap of getting on the right side of most issues and still losing the election.

A telling example is Shrum's recounting of how during the 2000 campaign "Gore was determined to give a blunt speech on global warming, and to do it in Michigan." Shrum and the rest of the staff talked Gore out of it, on the grounds that the issue "was a third rail in the automotive state of Michigan, a state we had to carry." And, indeed, such a speech almost certainly would have been unpopular in Michigan. On the other hand, voters with a direct financial interest in the issue were the people most likely already familiar with Gore's views, speech or no speech. What's more, Michigan *wasn't* strictly must-win—if Gore had carried Florida, he wouldn't have needed it. Giving the speech could not only have put him over the top in Florida, it would have countered the public's image of Gore as a phony, dull, passionless calculating figure by letting him connect with the environmental issues on which he was a lifelong advocate. It would also have allowed Gore to skewer Bush where *his* record was most vulnerable. The speech could have helped Gore establish a persona distinct from Clinton's, without forcing Gore to distance himself from Clinton's accomplishments. And even if the polls didn't show voters yearning for a speech on global warming, it was clear that the voters were yearning for Gore to do something that seemed driven by convictions rather than polls.

The trouble is that a bolder political strategy would genuinely have left its architect with no excuses. A consultant who told Gore to give the speech would have had nothing to say in his defense except that he was wrong. A consultant who urges his clients to follow the polls can, after the loss, turn around and point to the polls attributing the defeat to the inevitable gaffes, the vagaries of unexpected events, the perfidy of the opposition—to anything, that is, but the strategy. The strategy, after all, was backed up by data. So win or lose, the same consultants will live to run again in two years' time until, eventually, bored, they churn out a memoir complete with the requisite calls for bolder thinking. WM

Matthew Yglesias is an associate editor of the *Atlantic*.

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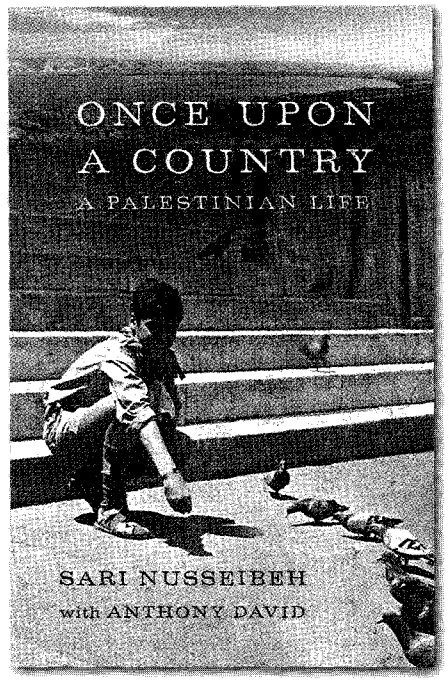
A Reason Not to Despair

Few players have navigated the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with more integrity than Sari Nusseibeh.

By Joshua Hammer



Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life

by Sari Nusseibeh, with Anthony David Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 560 pp.

At the height of the second Palestinian intifada five years ago, Sari Nusseibeh was a welcome—and lonely—voice of moderation. As the president of Al-Quds University and Yasser Arafat's administrator in East Jerusalem, Nusseibeh used his influential position as a bully pulpit to denounce the wave of suicide bombings that Palestinian militants were carrying out with quotidian regularity across the Green Line. Nusseibeh didn't exonerate the Israelis in the conflict; he sharply criticized Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and blamed Israeli revanchists for pushing Palestinians to despair through the relentless colonization of the West Bank. But his articulate denunciations of Palestinian nihilism were what most defined him—and what drew the ire of the "fanatics" who were setting the agenda. In a memorable interview with *New Yorker* editor David Remnick in 2002, Nusseibeh talked of the Palestinians' need to "resurrect the spirit of Christ" and restrain the impulse to respond to Israeli attacks and humiliation with more bloodshed. "They have to realize that an act of violence does not serve their interest," he said—an opinion that was, to say the least, not widely shared among Palestinians at the time.

Nusseibeh has been trying to find a way out of the Middle Eastern wilderness for decades, and that often frustrating, sometimes hopeful journey is chronicled in this absorbing new memoir. At one level *Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life* serves as a useful primer on the history of Israeli-Palestinian relations—a tale of wars, uprisings, progress, and dashed hopes—told with the immediacy and sometimes gossipy tone of an insider. But it's also the story of an Arab intellectual drawn against his better nature into the combative world of political activism. Nusseibeh was present, in body or in spirit, at every step of the conflict (he was studying at Oxford when the Six-Day War broke out, but returned days later to find Jerusalem transformed), and he came to play a critical role as a negotiatior for a two-state solution. How Nusseibeh got there, and how he continued the search for common ground in the face of repeated setbacks and appalling violence, is at the heart of this inspiring book.

Nusseibeh was destined to play a key role in shaping the future of his people. The scion of one of the most venerable clans in Jerusalem, Nusseibeh was conceived in 1948, the year of the Nakba, or Palestinian catastrophe. His father was a patrician attorney who organized the Arab defense of the Old City during the Arab-Israeli war and lost a leg in an ambush outside Jerusalem. (After the war, King Hussein of Jordan appointed him the governor of the Jerusalem region.) Strongly anti-Zionist, the elder Nusseibeh was also a relative moderate who scorned Jerusalem's mufti for his support of Adolf Hitler, and regarded the Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser as a dangerous demagogue. Young Sari fell in love with literature and first studied philosophy at Oxford (where he met his wife, the daughter of an English philosopher) and

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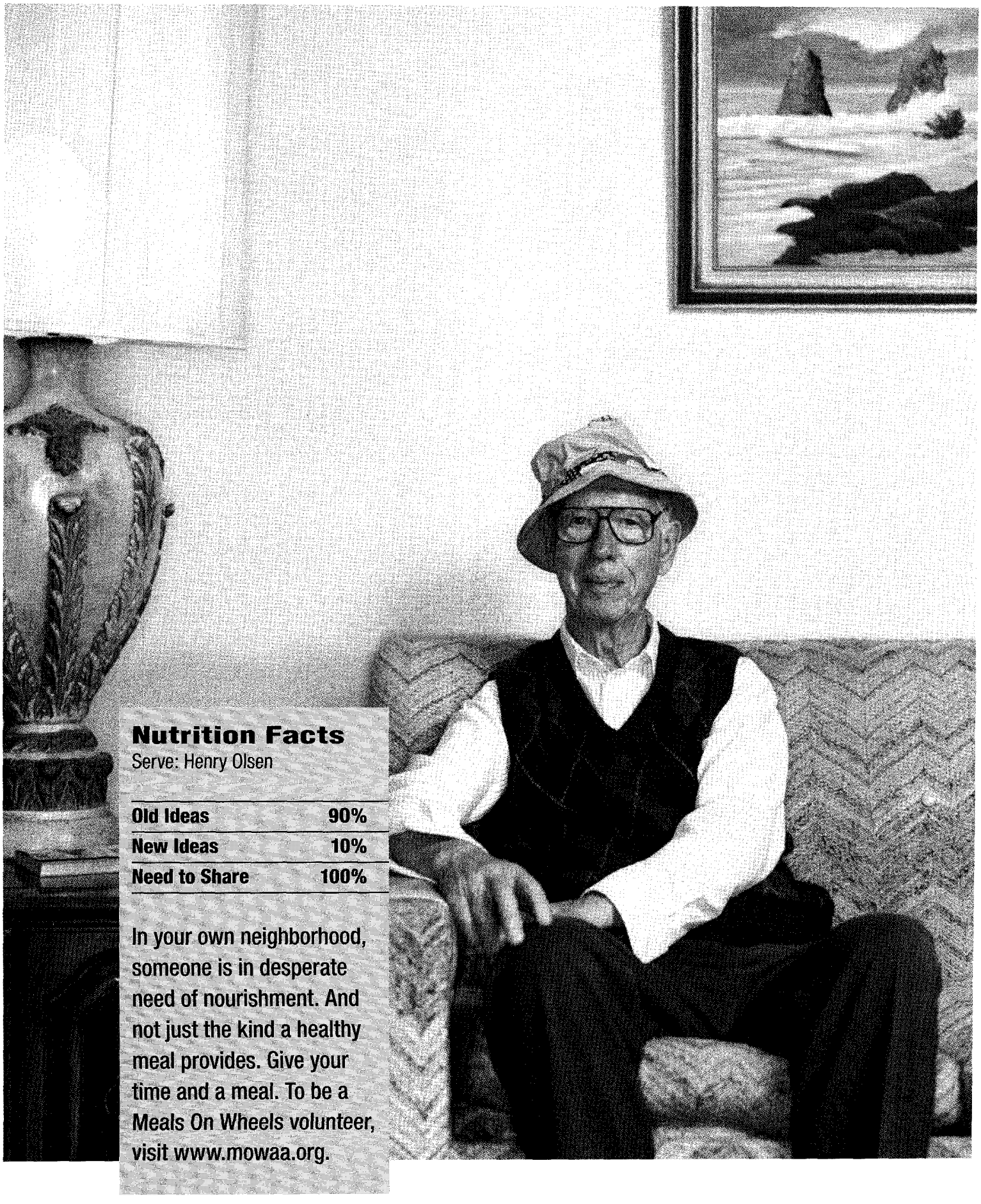

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then attended Harvard. Drawn back to the Holy Land, he found a teaching job at Birzeit University and found himself dragged inexorably into Palestinian political life.

Nusseibeh began his engagement advocating a single, democratic Arab-Jewish state, but the harsh realities of occupation convinced him of the impossibility of that dream. By the late 1970s, he writes, "far from bringing the sides closer together, occupation was turning Palestinians into a permanent underclass of workers whose land, resources, and basic rights were being systematically violated and stripped away." He saw that "a separatist Palestinian nationalist identity was growing stronger," and eventually he became swept up in the struggle. As an Arab Jerusalemite, with one foot planted in Israel and one in Palestine, he was in a key position to serve as a mediator between two increasingly implacable enemies. Ironically, Israel came to regard him as both a nuisance and a threat—and in 1991, at the outbreak of the first Gulf War, the Israeli government locked him up on flimsy charges of being an agent of Saddam Hussein. Nusseibeh's story is most gripping as it charts the urbane professor's improbable transformation into an activist, an undercover operative, and, during the first Palestinian uprising, a prisoner.

Nusseibeh's take on the collapse of the Camp David talks in July 2000 and the subsequent outbreak of the second intifada is provocative. Nusseibeh rejects the conventional wisdom that Arafat bears the brunt of the blame by refusing to accept Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's ostensibly generous offer. There's no question that Barak's concessions—the division of Jerusalem, the withdrawal of most West Bank settlements—went far beyond what any previous Israeli government had been willing to offer, but Nusseibeh makes a plausible case that his brinkmanship set the stage for disaster. After years of mutual distrust, neither side, he argues, was ready to commit to the final settlement that Barak, with Clinton's backing, was pushing. Nusseibeh accuses Barak of playing a "high-stakes game" that offered either "total agreement or apocalypse." The route to the apocalypse was greased, of course, by men with guns, such as the charismatic Fatah leader turned terrorist Marwan Barghouti. In a memorable encounter, Barghouti tells Nusseibeh that, in effect, "the Israeli political elite had to be shocked out of its political complacency through pain. Blood had to be drawn."

For me, as a former Middle East correspondent who lived through the most violent period in recent Israeli-Palestinian history, Nusseibeh's insights into the unfolding of the Al Aqsa intifada are particularly acute. We get fascinating thumbnail sketches of key actors in the drama, including Jibril Rajoub, the head of West Bank preventative security during the last years of Arafat. The burly, brusk Rajoub formed an unlikely kinship with the erudite Nusseibeh, borne of their shared familiarity with the Israeli mindset, belief in the possibility of finding common ground, and rejection of the campaign of suicide bombings. (Inexplicably, the Israeli military targeted Rajoub for assassination in May 2001, which led Nusseibeh—and other observers—to wonder whether Sharon and his hawkish circle, including his virulently anti-Arab minister of internal security, Uzi Landau, weren't deliberately trying to eliminate moderate voices.) The Palestinian figure at the center of the ongoing conflict, however, remains an enigma: Yasser Arafat comes off as a murky, maddeningly elusive character whose runic comments and general air of detachment seemed designed to give him plausible deniability on the darker aspects of Palestinian governance. Nusseibeh refuses to let him off the hook, however, holding him accountable for massive corruption within the Palestinian Authority as well as the incitement of violence.

His articulate denunciations of Palestinian nihilism were what most defined him—and what drew the ire of the "fanatics."

This is a book that is bound to enrage people on both sides, which is a measure of its potency. Many Israelis will reject Nusseibeh's arguments that the Oslo Accords were bound to fail because they were essentially a fool's game, coupling, as they did, vague promises of a future Palestinian state with unrelenting settlement expansion across the West Bank. They will be angered by his contentions that the Al Aqsa intifada was not an orchestrated uprising but a spontaneous expression of frustration and rage, and that Israel long pursued a policy of targeting moderates while allowing extremists to flourish. Many Palestinians will resent his characterization of the second uprising as a "catastrophic slapdash brawl without leadership, strategy or ideas ... a ruinous and sanguinary fit of madness." This balanced account of one man's commitment to peace in the face of long odds lets neither side off the hook. Its long chronicle of missteps, misunderstandings, and failures is steeped in regret. But even in the face of Hamas and Sharon's Wall, Nusseibeh is unwilling to surrender hope. "At the deepest metaphysical levels," he writes, "Jews and Arabs are 'allies.'" The fact that Nusseibeh can offer that judgment after all that has happened over the last half century is reason enough not to despair. WM

Joshua Hammer is a writer living in Berlin. His most recent book was *Yokohama Burning: The Deadly 1923 Earthquake and Fire That Helped Forge the Path to World War II*. He is currently working on a book about German colonial Africa and the twentieth century's first genocide, due out from Simon & Schuster next year.

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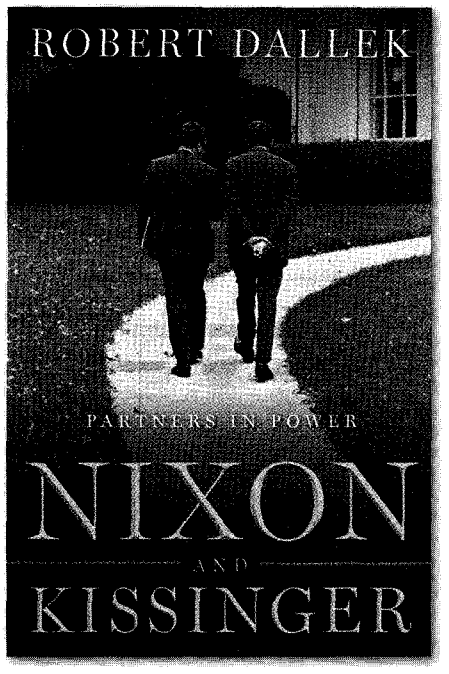
Those Weren't the Days



Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power
by Robert Dallek
HarperCollins, 752 pp.

Nixon has been looking better lately compared to George W. Bush. But in fact he's as bad as we remember.

By Jacob Heilbrunn

Liberal historians have begun waxing nostalgic about past Republican presidents, extolling them as presenting a stark contrast to the current occupant of the White House. Consider Ronald Reagan. Deemed a heartless and dangerous conservative in the 1980s, he is now being lionized by progressive scholars like John Patrick Diggins, who depicts him as a worthy successor to Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Perhaps the most interesting rehabilitation has been that of Richard Nixon. His image has gotten periodic makeovers since his resignation from the presidency in 1974 until his death in 1994, when he was hailed as an *éminence gris* of American politics. Nixon was a wise realist in foreign affairs, we are often told, who reached out to the Soviet Union and China. At the same time he instituted environmental reforms and pushed affirmative action on the domestic front. The moral seems simple enough: Bush represents a dangerous deviation from the sensible Republican presidents of yesteryear.

But as Robert Dallek's marvelous new book, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, demonstrates, the reality is much more complicated. Dallek, who has previously written critically acclaimed biographies of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, is a seasoned historian who follows the Plutarchian model of letting the evidence speak for itself. From the tens of thousands of pages of newly available documents—including Nixon tapes, Kissinger telephone transcripts, and national security files—Dallek offers a potent reminder of the widespread and oft-deserved loathing that Nixon and Kissinger inspired. Many stories of Nixon's perfidiousness are fairly well known, but Dallek does a commendable job of amplifying previous judgments with new material he has unearthed. What emerges is a portrayal of Nixon that can hardly compare favorably to George W. Bush for the simple reason that Nixon comes off as so much like George W. Bush.

Nixon in particular broke new ground as a polarizer. He wanted to turn his domestic critics into the functional equivalent of traitors; the antiwar college kids, whom he loathed, were supposed to serve as a kind of domestic Fifth Column, like the communists of the early 1950s, that could shore up the Republican base and stigmatize the Democrats in the eyes of the Silent Majority he felt he represented. In 1970, for example, Nixon's press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler read a statement of Nixon's after the shooting of students at Kent State which declared that it "should remind us all once again that when dissent turns to violence, it invites tragedy." It almost seemed that the president of the United States was blaming the students for their own deaths. According to Dallek, nothing shook Nixon's conviction that he needed to wage warfare on his opponents. Despite his landslide election victory in 1972, Nixon was, Dallek writes, "almost morbid," convinced that his adversaries in the Georgetown salons and elsewhere were already plotting to undo him. Indeed, "he saw the price of reelection

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as a fresh round of conflict with domestic enemies"—read liberal elites.

Like George W. Bush, Nixon worked overtime to portray himself as a populist battling effete elites intent on subverting the American way. There are other similarities: the White House's obsession with secrecy was the precursor of the Bush administration's penchant for running roughshod over the nation's laws. The parallels between the Vietnam War and the Iraq War—the official lies, the pretense of victory, the misuse of the military, the disdain for democracy, the bogus patriotism, and the contempt for civil liberties—are inescapable. And the longer the war continued, the more it corroded America's domestic liberties. Public opposition to the war led Nixon and Kissinger to approve gross abuses of civil liberties, including wiretapping their own subordinates, in the name of national security. They were contemptuous of public debate, congressional input, and professional diplomats. Instead, they wanted to operate on a loftier plane free of the constraints of a democratic government. Sound familiar?

Nixon's paranoia about liberals showed most unpleasantly through his dislike of Jews. Though Nixon had Jewish advisers—including, of course, Henry Kissinger—he clearly saw Jews as a group as a leading enemy of his. Nixon's antipathy toward Jews is hardly a secret, but Dallek suggests that it reached pathological proportions. No doubt Nixon's hatred of the press corps, particularly the *New York Times*, was largely rooted in his sense of aggrievement and loathing of Jews. The truth was that anti-Semitism played well on the right for many decades; historian David Greenberg has noted that "in Nixon's early campaigns, anti-Semitism was a latent theme."

In essence, Nixon had the worldview of the classic anti-Semite: he saw Jews as having innate (and unpleasant) group characteristics rather than viewing them as individuals. Again and again, he blamed Jews for his difficulties. When the My Lai massacre was revealed, for example, Nixon knew who was at fault: "It's those dirty rotten Jews from New York who are behind it," he told his aides. He also enjoyed deriding Jews in front of Kissinger: "Isn't that right, Henry? Don't you agree?" Kissinger's response was downright creepy: "Well, Mr. President, there are Jews and then there are Jews."

Kissinger was intent on maintaining Nixon's goodwill. Uneasy with his own Jewish identity (his family had emigrated from Nazi Germany in 1938), which he sought, as far as possible, to suppress, partly by identifying himself with the WASP establishment, Kissinger never dared remonstrate with Nixon about his crudity. And Nixon never let an opportunity slip to administer a verbal slap to his aide. Once, after Kissinger expressed a view on the Middle East at a National Security Council meeting, Nixon said, "Now can we get an American point of view?" And after aides informed Nixon that Vice President Spiro Agnew's rhetoric was prompting an increase in newspaper articles suggesting Agnew was responsible for an increase in anti-Semitic hate mail, Nixon wrote, "Keep it up."

Nixon had the worldview of the classic anti-Semite: he saw Jews as having innate (and unpleasant) group characteristics rather than viewing them as individuals.

What, then, prompted Nixon to hand Kissinger the job of national security adviser in the first place? One reason was that they were both realists in foreign policy. They viewed talk about human rights as sentimental claptrap. Another was that they saw eye to eye about the liberal establishment. Nixon may have resented the establishment because he could never penetrate it; Kissinger, by contrast, saw it up close and believed that it was soft. It had turned tail once the going got rough in Vietnam. This, Kissinger thought, was disgraceful. A superpower had to flex its muscles, not capitulate to a backward, Third World insurgency. The eastern establishment, he believed, had become as timorous as the liberals who had capitulated to Nazism during Weimar Germany.

Dallek is wise to emphasize the key role that Nixon and Kissinger's outsize personalities played in shaping their policies. They weren't statesmen simply reacting rationally to world events. Rather, they were at once ruthless and insecure, consumed by their personal hatreds and fears.

According to Dallek, "harsh life experiences had made both men cynical about people's motives and encouraged convictions that outdoing opponents required a relaxed view of scruples. Ironically, their cynicism would also make them rivals who could not satisfy their aspirations without each other." Both men, for example, were infuriated by Daniel Ellsberg's release of the Pentagon Papers, not because they thought there was anything devastating in the papers themselves, but because they viewed intellectuals with contempt. A "weirdo," as senior Nixon aide H. R. Haldeman put it, shouldn't be challenging the president. As Nixon once said to Kissinger, "I don't give a goddamn about repression, do you?" "No," Kissinger answered. It might be tempting to view this as locker-room braggadocio, but their readiness to countenance the rise of an authoritarian regime in Chile suggests that it was not.

Nixon and Kissinger launched an enormously ambitious overhaul of American foreign policy. They not only expanded the Vietnam War into Cambodia and Laos, but also launched détente with the Soviet Union in the face of enormous opposition from the right. They established diplomatic relations with China, meddled endlessly in Central and South America, and worked tirelessly to establish Middle East peace.

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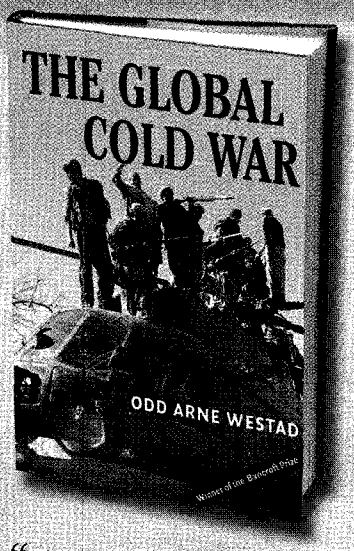

"Westad's account is sharply observed and deeply researched...this book is **superb**."
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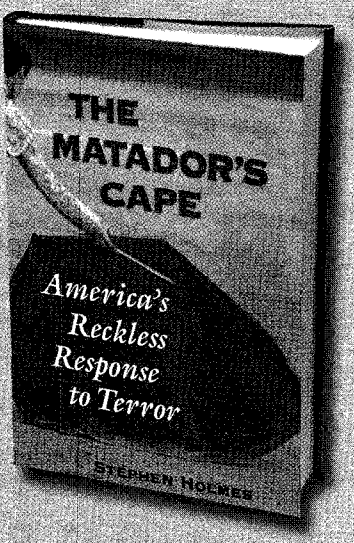

"A **brilliant** dissection of the deeper causes of an American tragedy."
–Bruce Ackerman, Yale University Law School

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Nixon was elected on the presumption that he had a plan for ending the Vietnam War. This, as we now know, was wrong. As Dallek notes, Nixon proved no more flexible than Lyndon B. Johnson. In part, Nixon and Kissinger were fixated with appearing tough—legitimately fearful, like Johnson, of a right-wing backlash. They were determined to try and eke out what Kissinger later called "peace with honor." But neither was really convinced that the United States could win the war, and both felt that a rapid withdrawal would amount to an explicit confession of defeat, turning the U.S. into what Nixon called "a pitiful giant."

Harsh life experiences had made both men cynical about people's motives and encouraged convictions that outdoing opponents required a relaxed view of scruples.

Instead, Nixon and Kissinger sacrificed a further 20,000 American soldiers, as they relentlessly bombed the Viet Cong and Hanoi, and expanded the war to Cambodia. Whether the terms of the 1973 Paris Peace Accords were really any different from what could have been signed in 1969 is difficult to imagine. Both men genuinely believed that a precipitous U.S. withdrawal would have had devastating effects for American foreign policy, particularly in the struggle against Soviet communism. But as it turns out, fifteen years after America's ignominious withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975 the entire Soviet Union collapsed.

Few leaders think of themselves as actively malevolent, and Nixon certainly didn't. In fact, as Dallek notes, Nixon genuinely wanted to be thought of as a peacemaker and had a stubborn streak of idealism. (The author notes that Nixon used Woodrow Wilson's desk in the Oval Office.) Nixon's peacemaking instincts were at their best in his approaches to China and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet Union. Nixon thought he could use the opening to China both as a way to end hostilities between it and America and as a card to play against the Soviet Union. It was undoubtedly a bold and courageous move on Nixon's part, particularly given his earlier record of irresponsibly assailing Harry S. Truman and Dean Acheson for "losing" China to the reds. When it came to détente with the Kremlin, Dallek suggests that Nixon's motivations were less about the Soviet Union than about other matters. Nixon, as Dallek sees it, didn't really believe that détente could accomplish much in the way of easing the U.S.-Soviet military rivalry. At best, he hoped that it would induce the Soviet Union to force the Viet Cong to back down—a gross overestimation of the Kremlin's real influence in the conflict.

Then there were Nixon and Kissinger's domestic political calculations. Dallek reveals that Kissinger explicitly warned Nixon about the perils of signing an early peace agreement. According to Dallek, "Nixon wanted to plan the removal of all U.S. troops by the end of 1971, but [Kissinger] cautioned that if North Vietnam then destabilized Saigon in 1972, it could have an adverse effect on the president's reelection." Dallek continues, "He recommended a pullout in the fall of 1972, 'so that if any bad results follow they will be too late to affect the election.' He apparently had nothing to say about the American lives that would be lost in the service of Nixon's reelection."

If Dallek offers a mixed portrait of Nixon, his depiction of Kissinger is searing. Nixon was a truly sad figure, his own worst enemy, marinating in his resentments. Dallek censures Kissinger for catering to those resentments. "His blind loyalty to Nixon," says Dallek, "was a disservice to the country." But as Dallek

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also shows, it was more about loyalty to himself than to Nixon. Dallek believes that Nixon was so impaired by Watergate, physically and psychologically, that Kissinger should have conferred with other cabinet members about suspending his authority under the provisions of the Constitution's Twenty-fifth Amendment. By the time of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Kissinger had basically usurped control over foreign policy, barely even bothering to consult Nixon. Kissinger had no inclination to challenge the president directly or risk his own position. His goal had always been to surpass Nixon, and he was not about to forfeit his opportunity at the moment of Nixon's boozy incapacitation. Nor does Dallek believe that Kissinger, as he himself depicted it, was somehow indispensable during Watergate: "[O]ther highly competent foreign policy experts ... could have conducted diplomacy and defended the national interests with equal competence to Kissinger."

Dallek has done a prodigious amount of research for this 752-page work, with its nearly seventy-five pages of notes. No meeting is too obscure, no memorandum too recondite for Dallek to reproduce. At times, the sheer amount of information that Dallek has collected may overwhelm all but the most ardent student of the Nixon era. As Dr. Johnson once dryly observed of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, none ever wished it longer. Still, Dallek's reconstruction of Nixon and Kissinger's years in office provides an amazingly intimate account of the Nixon presidency. It will hardly end the debate over Nixon, but Dallek has produced what amounts to a prodigious roadblock in the path of those who would rehabilitate his reputation.

And while Dallek may confine himself to the Nixon years, his history has broader implications. The lamentable mindset that Nixon and Kissinger displayed then lingers on today. In 2004, at a small meeting at the Library of Congress convened in Kissinger's honor, I had listened to Samuel Huntington, Paul Kennedy, and John Lewis Gaddis discuss Kissinger's legacy. As the morning session drew to a close, Kissinger himself rose, and everyone craned their necks to hear the great man's words. He said that he had supported the Iraq War, not because it was necessary, but precisely because it wasn't. The Arab world, he continued, had to realize that when attacked America would respond with massive, disproportionate force. With George W. Bush receiving advice like that from one of the architects of the Vietnam War, is it any wonder that he is mired in a conflict that seems even more intractable? WM

Jacob Heilbrunn is a writer living in Washington, D.C. His new book, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons*, is due out from Doubleday in December of this year.

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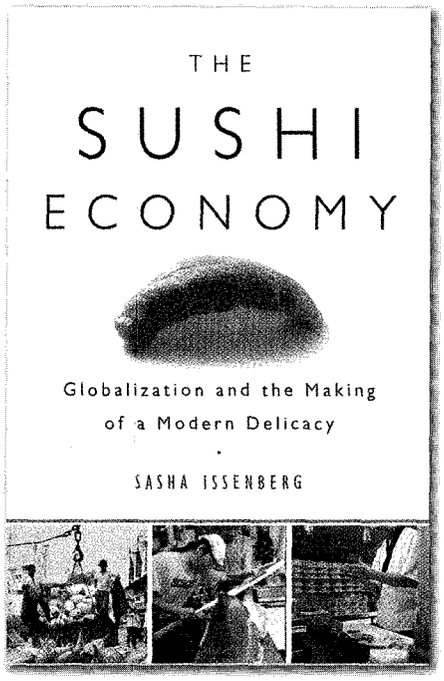

The Sushi Economy: Globalization and the Making of a Modern Delicacy

by Sasha Issenberg
Gotham, 323 pp.

Is the spread of sushi to middle-class American malls a good globalization story?

By Brendan I. Koerner

Midway through *The Breakfast Club*, John Hughes's seminal film about Reagan-era teen angst, the five main characters tuck into brown-bag lunches. Actress Molly Ringwald, playing the archetypal suburban princess, pulls out a tray of sushi, to the astonishment of Judd Nelson's drug-addled outcast. "You won't accept a guy's tongue in your mouth, and you're going to eat *that*?" he sneers, obviously never having sampled a piece of *toro* (fatty tuna) or *hamachi* (yellowtail) himself.

Ringwald's character is offended by the innuendo, but also derisive of her inquisitor's lack of sophistication. "Can I eat?" she huffs in response.

"I don't know," says Nelson, eyes wide with revulsion. "Give it a try."

Depicting Ringwald's spoiled brat as an unapologetic sushi eater was an easy way for Hughes to underscore her elitism. In 1985, the year *The Breakfast Club* came out, sushi was still a mystery to most Americans, who associated the food with flighty Hollywood stars and reprehensible yuppies. Raw fish and seaweed, rolled into cones or tubes? Such dainty, briny fare was surely part of a Japanese plot to weaken the American spirit.

Twenty-two years later, Hughes's cinematic shorthand seems archaic, akin to sticking a handlebar mustache on a movie's villain. No self-respecting American city, however distant from the oceans, is without a sushi restaurant, perhaps one that offers a $12.99 all-you-can-eat special on Monday nights, or prepackaged trays of Philadelphia rolls tinged with cream cheese. Sushi is a favorite of fictional gangster Tony Soprano, and of real-life football demigod Peyton Manning (who, according to the *Boston Herald*, recently treated on-the-field rival Tom Brady to a dinner of *toro* tartare, *hamachi* with elephant garlic, and hot sake).

Sasha Issenberg, a *Philadelphia* magazine writer (and occasional *Washington Monthly* contributor) best known for exposing the mendacity of *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, shares these macho heroes' zeal for sushi. But he also realizes that there's something a smidge bizarre about a world in which the landlocked residents of, say, Oklahoma or Paraguay enjoy seemingly inexhaustible supplies of fatty tuna, while Tokyoites have learned to love *unagi* (grilled eel) served on buttery croissants. Issenberg's meticulously reported *The Sushi Economy: Globalization and the Making of a Modern Delicacy* explains not only how sushi evolved from reviled curiosity into beloved treat in the United States, but also how the skyrocketing demand for *ika* (squid), *uni* (sea urchin roe), and, above all, *toro* has simultaneously knocked both nature and commerce askew.

The Sushi Economy opens with a zinger of an anecdote, which Issenberg presents as modern sushi's Eureka moment. In the early 1970s, executives at Japan Airlines fretted that the cargo holds on their Vancouver-to-Tokyo flights were often empty. So the airline asked its Canadian freight coordinator, a man named Wayne MacAlpine, to look into whether these planes could be crammed with bluefin tuna from Prince Edward Island. McAlpine was somewhat baffled by the request, since fishermen on the island, some 2,800 miles to the east of Vancouver, didn't much care for the bluefin's taste—

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as he Teletyped back to his bosses in Japan, "What [the fishermen] did after they caught them is they had their picture taken with the fish and dug a hole with a small bulldozer and buried them."

The airline executives were stunned: each buried bluefin could garner hundreds, even thousands, of dollars in Japan, a country already suffering the ravages of overfishing. The company took the unprecedented step of importing five Canadian bluefins for a 1972 auction at Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market. The giant tunas proved a hit, selling for the then-steep price of $4 per kilogram. The race to satiate the world's *toro* jones was on. "Sushi was nearly two millennia old," writes Issenberg, "but it was that morning at Tsukiji that the current experience of eating it was born."

The Japan Airlines experiment was largely a triumph of technology: a special refrigeration unit had been developed to prevent the tunas' flesh from blanching while in transit. Yet it also signaled how Japan's culinary tastes, as well as its economic fortunes, had changed since the Imperial Era. Before World War II, tuna was considered an inferior fish, sushi's answer to beef knuckles. And the fattiest part of a tuna wasn't even deemed fit for human consumption; it was instead reserved for cat food. The Japanese first learned the pleasures of greasy meats during the late 1940s, when they mimicked the carnivorous habits of their American occupiers. As their nation's fiscal health improved, Issenberg writes, the Japanese began to indulge ever more openly in gastronomic excess: "Soon, Tokyo palates were acting a lot like those in Paris or Chicago, which associated luxury with rich fat, whether in *fois gras*, chocolate truffles, soft cheese, or porterhouses-for-two."

One of the first non-Japanese entrepreneurs to capitalize on this trend was a man known for presiding over mass weddings rather than hooking fish: Reverend Sun Myung Moon, founder of the controversial Unification Church. In 1978, Moon opened a tuna business in Gloucester, Massachusetts, transforming the coastal town into a major *toro* supplier. Another business founded by Moon, True World Foods of Chicago, would go on to become America's dominant sushi supplier; odds are your last piece of *kanpachi* (young yellowtail) or *saba* (mackerel) passed through True World's hands.

When Japan's economy was at its frothiest, Gloucester bluefins could fetch $50 per pound at Tsukiji. But overfishing and the yen's tumble have ended those halcyon days, as Issenberg discovered on his gloomy visit to New England: "Where fishermen once might have wanted to know whether anyone had a fish that broke $20 per pound in Tokyo, now they just wanted to know whether anything had been caught at all."

Australian aquaculturists have gladly filled the void. In one of *The Sushi Economy*'s best chapters, Issenberg heads to Port Lincoln, home to Australia's so-called tuna barons, who raise the prized fish in pens. Keeping the world awash in sushi has made the barons exorbitantly wealthy: I don't think I'll ever have another piece of *toro* without thinking of Sam Sarin, a baron who styled his garish estate after Southfork Ranch, home to the Ewing clan on the 1980s soap opera *Dallas*. The Port Lincoln tunas aren't considered of especially high quality (Issenberg compares them to New Balance sneakers), but that doesn't bother many buyers nowadays—the end consumers who pay $5.99 for six-piece supermarket sushi trays aren't going to complain. Besides, a good proportion of that ranched tuna ends up in such novelties as spicy tuna rolls, an American creation which uses mayonnaise and hot sauce to mask the taste of subpar fish.

Issenberg is clearly a lifelong sushi connoisseur, so there's a hint of sadness to his descriptions of the cuisine's vulgarization—the takeout chains where pieces are "either punched out and assembled by automated machines known as 'sushi robots' or by minimally trained human beings"; the Los Angeles restaurant where the chefs double as tap dancers. And he notes that

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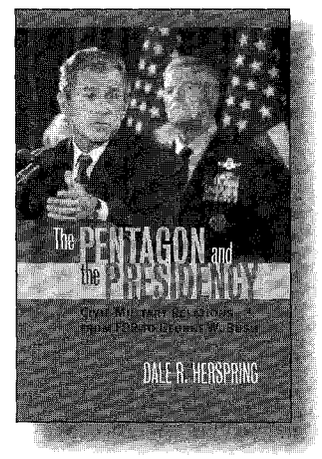

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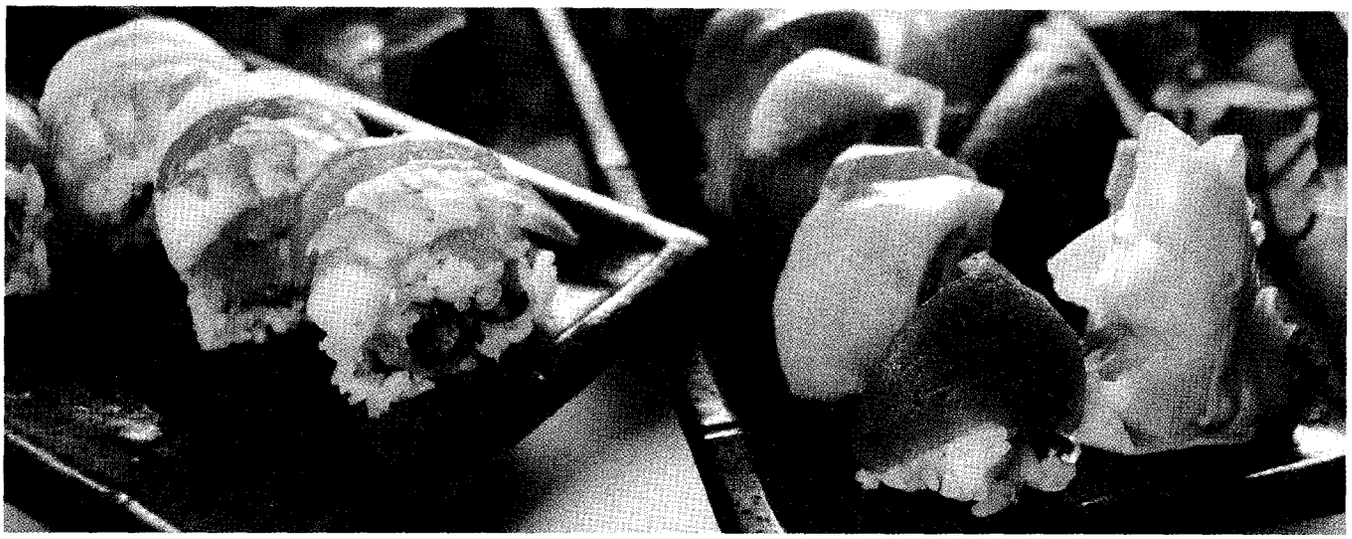

the venerable Nobu Matsuhisa, whose eponymous New York City restaurant popularized nouveau sushi among the glitterati, has become more corporate mascot than authentic chef: "These days, Matsuhisa seems to pick up a knife only for photo shoots." Nobu branches, meanwhile, now operate in Dallas, Las Vegas, and the Bahamas; in the last of these locations, every single piece of fish must be shipped in from Miami, since there is no local seafood market.

Since fishing is such an uncertain business, many of the deals that keep the sushi trade afloat depend on trust, often between two parties who don't share the same continent, let alone the same language.

But Issenberg never wallows in foodie nostalgia. Instead, he celebrates sushi's emergence as a case of globalization at its best, with consumers and producers working in relative harmony despite rarely encountering one another face-to-face. At its best, *The Sushi Economy* reads like the giddiest, geekiest Food Network special ever made, a paean to man's endless innovation in the name of gluttony. It's certainly tough not to enjoy a book that includes a step-by-step guide to winning Port Lincoln's annual tuna-tossing competition ("Stand with your back to the intended destination and spin two rotations counterclockwise ...").

There are moments, however, when Issenberg's infatuation with microscopic detail can grate rather than entertain. A chapter on the education of a Texan sushi chef, for example, bogs down in a list of his restaurant's expenditures, broken down to the dollar. And Issenberg's description of the Tsukiji market moves at a snail's pace, as he fixates on the compound's geometric layout: "There are eight streets," he writes, "ordered concentrically, which are intersected by seven avenues, evenly spaced radii ..."

Thankfully, *The Sushi Economy* never entirely loses sight of its larger themes. Issenberg views sushi's spread as confirmation that "a virtuous global commerce and food culture can exist"—in other words, that people can enjoy their *toro* without screwing over another community some several thousand miles away. He naturally credits this to the free market and technological progress, but also to genuine human decency. Since fishing is such an uncertain business, many of the deals that keep the sushi trade afloat depend on trust, often between two parties who don't share the same continent, let alone the same language. Yet the system works, Issenberg contends, because all societies share the inborn knack for commerce—not to mention the flexibility necessary to adapt foreign cuisine for local palates.

These big-picture lessons about globalization may not be particularly revelatory, but they're well illustrated by Issenberg's admirably exhaustive reporting. Judging by the book's acknowledgments, he spent time in at least sixteen cities, ranging from Shanghai to Barcelona to Chascomus, Argentina. My only quibble with Issenberg's itinerary is that he never spent time in—or, at least, he failed to set a scene in—one of the countless minimall sushi bars that now thrive in Landlocked America, where *toro* was eschewed as effete just a generation ago. (The Texas restaurant doesn't really count, as it's located in affluent, bohemian Austin.) But perhaps this is understandable: if I were in charge of organizing a sushi reporting trip, I'd much rather dine at the Tsukiji market in Tokyo than at Sushi Factory in Omaha. WM

Brendan I. Koerner (www.youthrobber.com) is a contributing editor at *Wired* and a columnist for the *New York Times*. His first book, about a 1940s murder case, will be published by the Penguin Press next spring.

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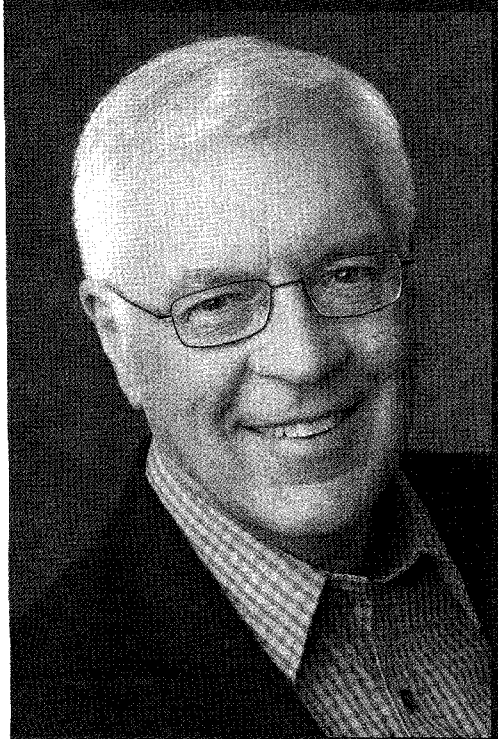

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